



Mother and Child

AT  
A J A N T A  
BY  
KANAIYALAL H. VAKIL, B.A., LL.B.

3335

FOREWORD  
BY  
W. E. GLADSTONE SOLOMON, I.E.S.  
*Author of "Jottings at Ajanta," "The  
Women of the Ajanta Caves," Etc.*

*With 38 Illustrations*

BOMBAY

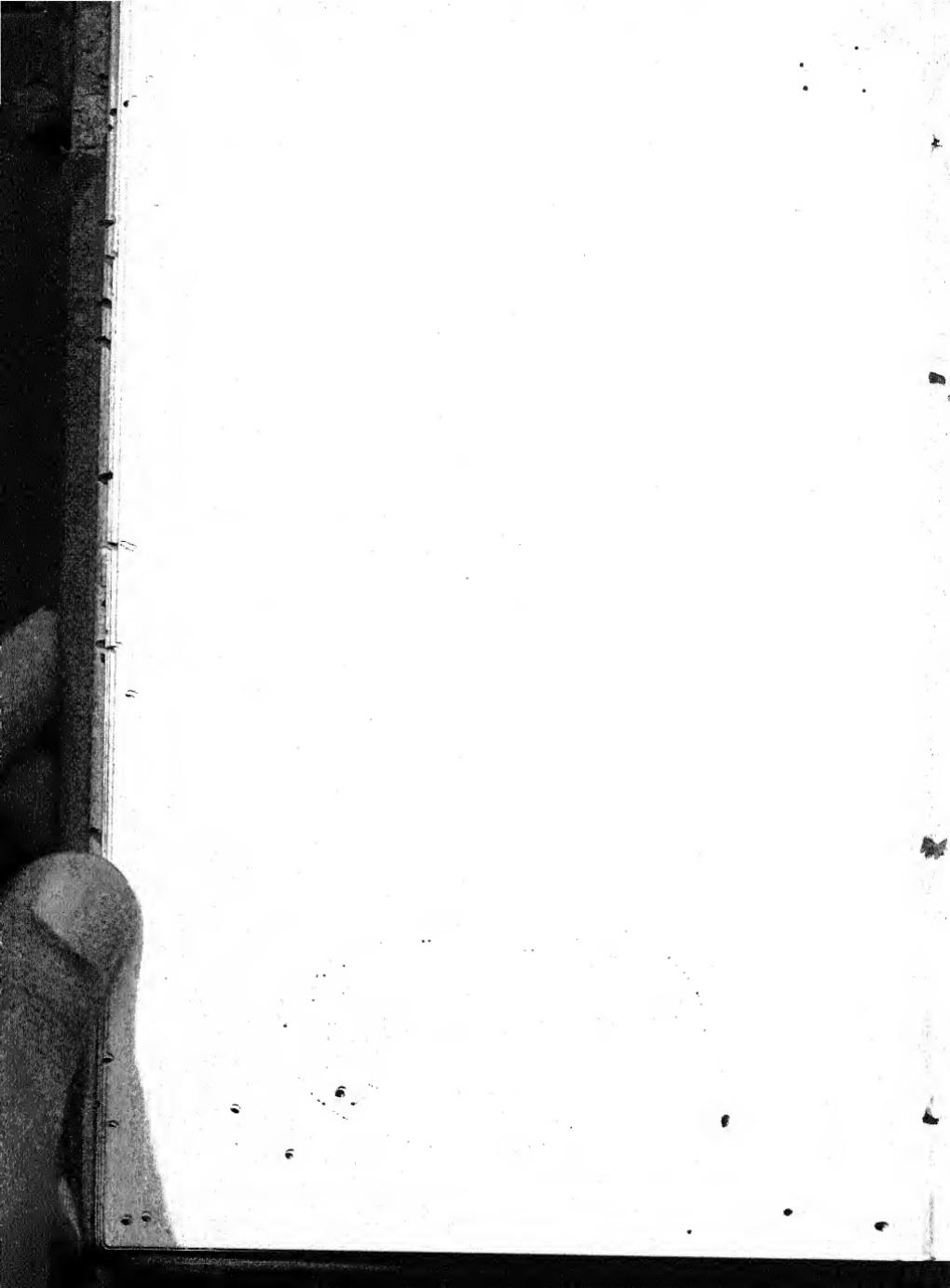
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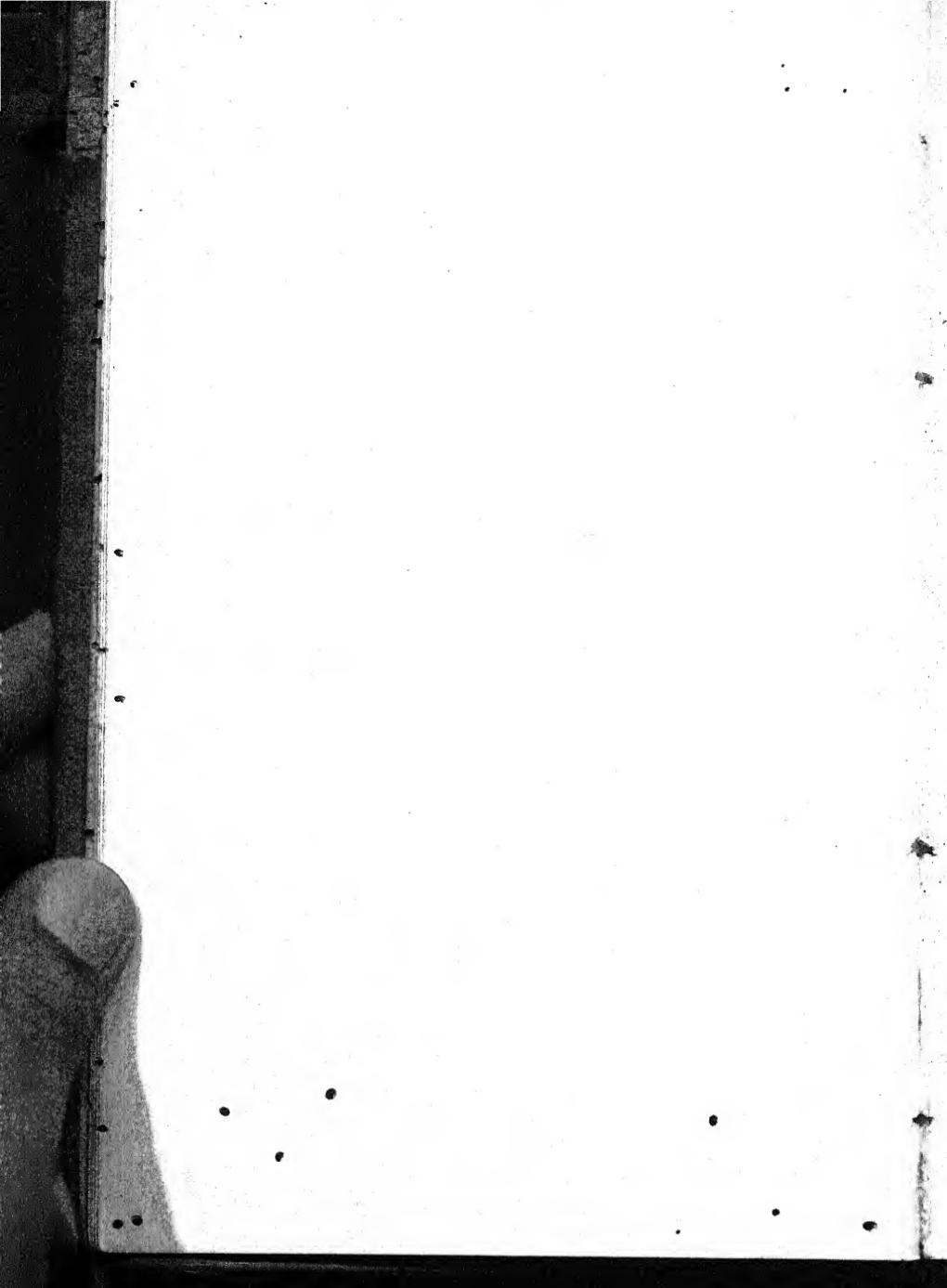


## PUBLISHERS' NOTE

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THE Publishers desire to tender their thanks to Mr. Ghulam Yazdani, Director of Archæology, H. E. H. the Nizam's Government, for permitting them to reproduce several photographs contained in this brochure and supplying them with valuable information for incorporation therein.

They will always be pleased to receive from readers, visitors and those interested in the subject, new information, photographs, drawings, etc., which will add to the usefulness of the book.



## PREFACE

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THE book is planned and written for a specific purpose. Its aim is to bring the world-renowned cave-cathedrals and monasteries at Ajanta nearer the popular mind and imagination. The assistance it proposes to offer to the visitor, student of art, or, one interested generally in the live and distinct artistic achievements of India, is of a character essentially practical. An attempt is now made, therefore, to classify the available information. There are, naturally, aspects or points in the book which, no doubt, reveal in treatment preferences that may be regarded as personal. But the book is not, on the whole, meant to convey more than the essentials necessary for the specific aim that has prompted its publication.

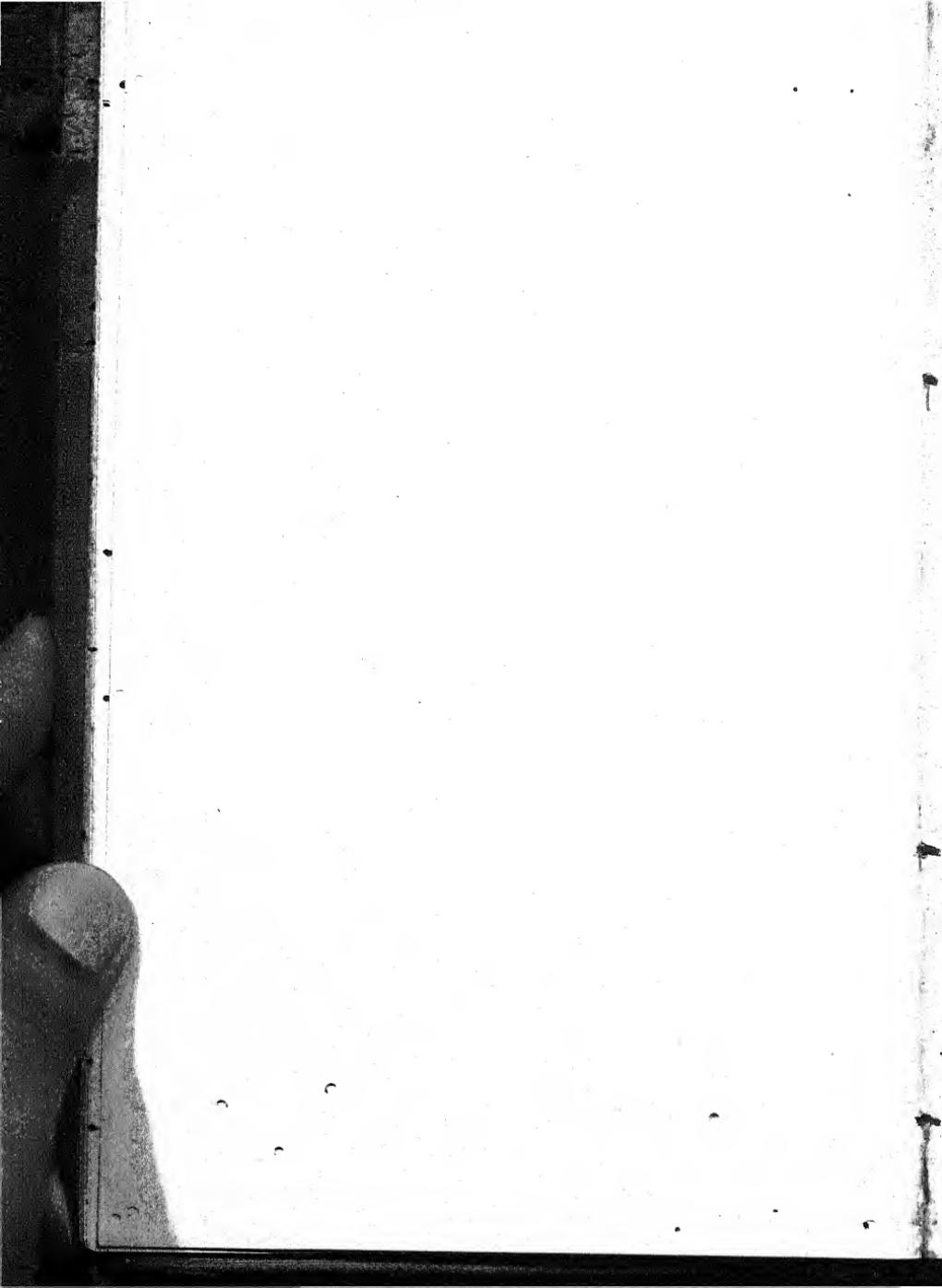
I am grateful to Captain W. E. Gladstone Solomon, Principal of the Bombay School of Art, for his kind references and loan of photographs. I am also thankful to the Archaeological Department of H. E. H. the Nizam's Government for the facilities granted to me during my stay, last October, at the Caves, to Mr. Kallianji Curumsey Damji for permission to reproduce the photographs of his copies of the Ajanta paintings by Mr. Mukul Dey, and to Mr. C. B. Suthar, G. D. Arch., for architectural drawings reproduced in this book.

K. H. V.

*"Villa Vasant,"*

SANTA CRUZ:

February 20, 1928.



## FOREWORD

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THE author of this book is one of the foremost of that energetic group of "constructive" art critics who in India are studying Art to new purposes. It is many years ago since I first met Mr. Kanaiyalal Vakil. He was then newly returned from a prolonged stay in Europe, and was, I recollect, full of the latest information about the Architecture, Painting and Sculpture of the Western World. His enthusiasm for Indian Art awoke an immediate response in one who—he admits it without shame—is also of the enthusiastic fraternity. Time has ratified these first impressions and has justified Mr. Kanaiyalal Vakil's optimistic but wholly reasonable methods of art criticism. That the optimist is badly needed in Indian Art to-day, few conversant with standard books on the subject, are likely to deny. For the function of the art critic is not mere destructive criticism of existing systems of Art or Art Education (there has been an excess of that in Europe as in India), but to point out to the public "the more excellent way," the way of true artistic progress. Mr. Vakil has rendered yeoman service to Western India, and not by words only but by the most devoted deeds. I know none who have more freely sacrificed time, health, and talent in the cause of promoting production in Indian Art at the present day than the author of this book. The fact that he has won the confidence of so many artists, is his

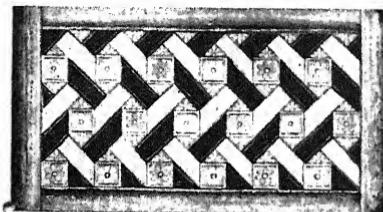
reward, for the distrust of the artist for the art critic is an inherited feud dating back long before the famous quarrel between Michael Angelo and Pietro Aretino !

The reader of this book will, it is hoped, find it to be a judicial "summing-up" of the case for the celebrated Ajanta Caves. The author has placed conveniently before his readers, in brief, the views and opinions of most of those who have written upon the subject of this perennially interesting Shrine of Art. It is a handbook of Ajanta Lore, replete with suggestive references. But I venture to think that the most interesting passages for most readers will be those wherein Mr. Vakil has yielded perforce to the urge of his artistic enthusiasm—impatient of restraint—those wherein we see the Scholar, Guide and Critic transformed into the Seer, before whose eye Indian Art unrolls its gorgeous achievements in the Past, only that he may point out triumphantly the path to the Future.

W. E. G. S.

BOMBAY.

*March 4, 1928.*



VIII—A

## **Some of the Books Consulted**

- “Cave Temples of India” .. Burgess & Fergusson.  
“A History of Fine Art in India  
and Ceylon” .. .. .. Vincent A. Smith.  
“Indian Architecture” .. .. E. B. Havell.  
“My Pilgrimage to Ajanta and  
Bagh” .. .. .. Mukul Dey.  
“Jottings at Ajanta” .. .. W. E. Gladstone  
Solomon.  
“The Women of the Ajanta  
Caves” .. .. .. W. E. Gladstone  
Solomon.  
“Life in India” .. .. .. Mrs. Spier.  
“Survey Reports” .. .. A. Cunningham.  
“Ancient India” .. .. .. Codrington and  
Rothenstein.  
“Influences of Indian Art” .. Andreas Nell (India  
Society.)  
“La Sculpture Hindoue” .. Wm. Cohn.  
“Handbook of Architecture” .. J. Fergusson.  
“Guide to Ajanta Frescoes” .. Archaeological De-  
partment, H. E. H.  
The Nizam’s Govt.  
“Rock-cut Temples of India” .. J. Fergusson.  
“Ajanta Frescoes” .. .. Lady Herringham.  
“The Paintings in the Buddhist  
Caves at Ajanta” .. .. J. Griffiths.



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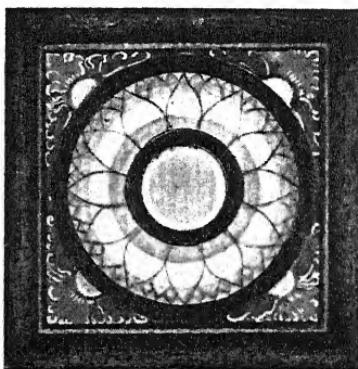
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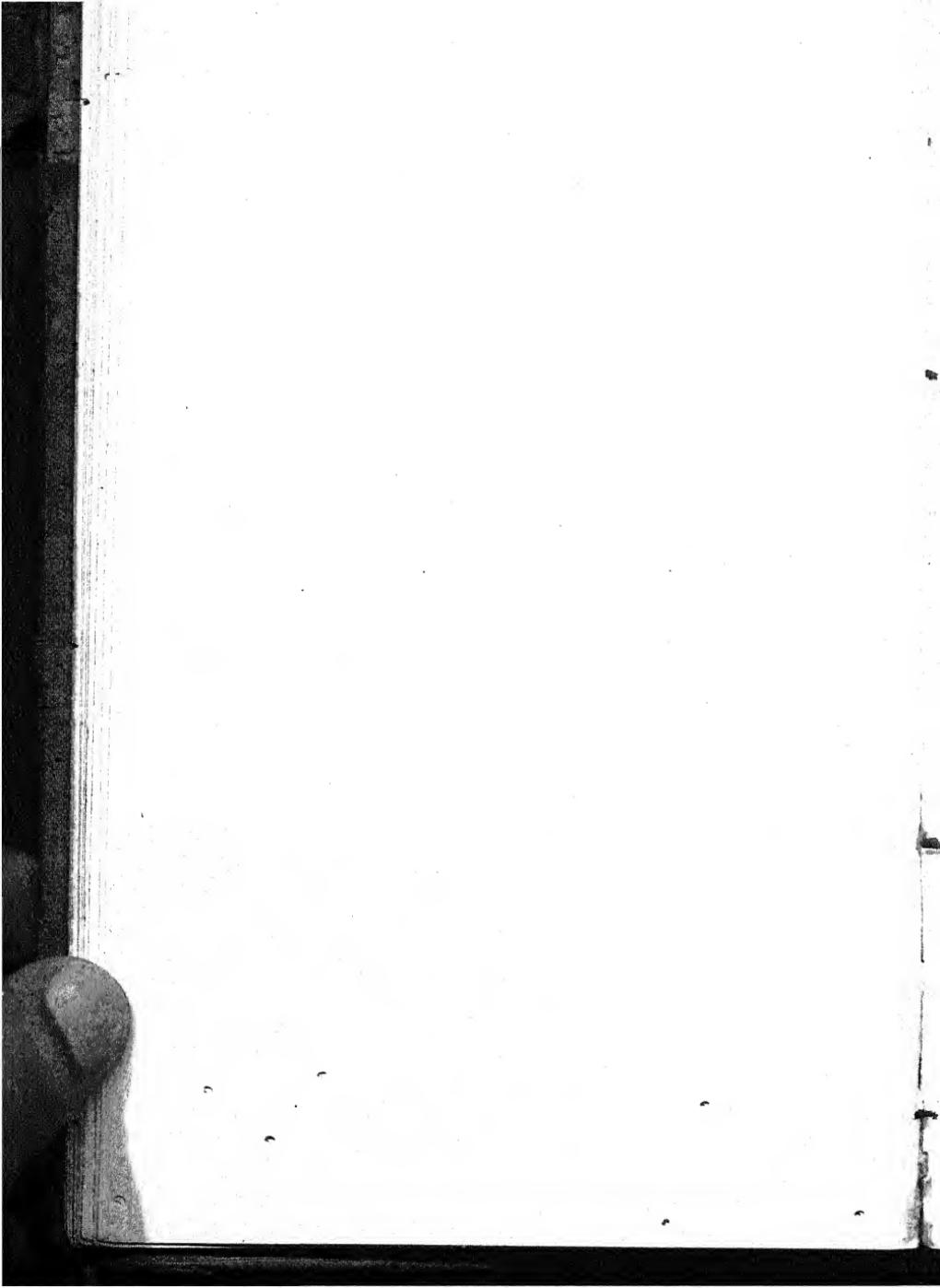
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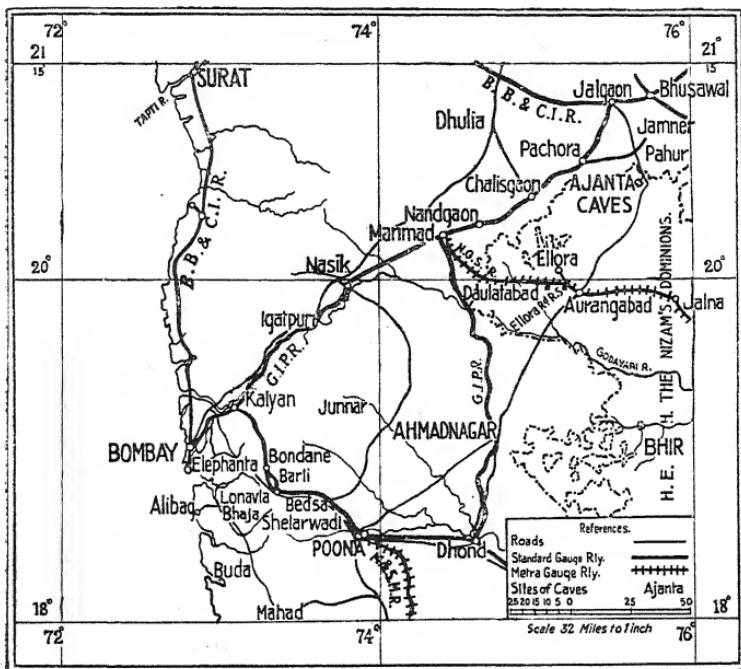
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PART I  
GENERAL INFORMATION  
(i)  
THE JOURNEY TO AJANTA



## RAILWAY AND ROAD ROUTES



### RAILWAY ROUTES :—

Jalgaon—Tapti Valley & G. I. P. Railway.

Aurangabad—Nizam's G. S. Railway.

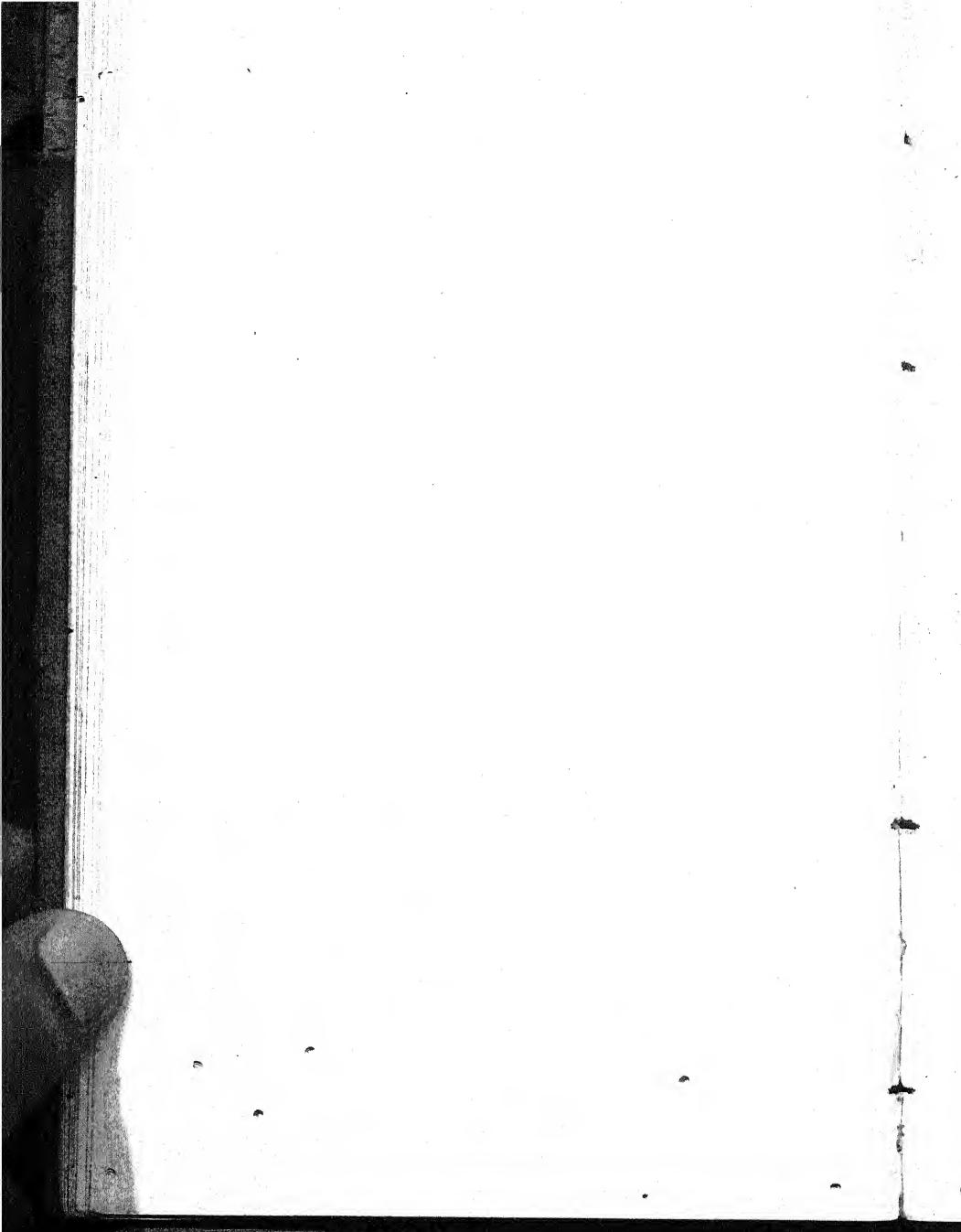
Pahur—Pachora—Jamner Railway.

### DISTANCES TO THE CAVES BY ROAD :—

From Jalgaon to Ajanta South, 37 miles.

,, Aurangabad to Ajanta North, 55 miles.

,, Pahur to Ajanta, 13 miles.



## Railway Connections

The plan (p. 3) shows the three Railway routes to Ajanta. The visitor can detrain for Ajanta from any of the three Railway Stations indicated there, viz., *Jalgaon*, *Aurangabad* or *Pahur*.

For visitors from Delhi and the North, as well as for those from Sind, Kathiawar, Rajputana and Gujarat, the shortest route would be from *Surat* to *Jalgaon* on the Tapti Valley Railway.

Visitors from Calcutta and the East would find *Jalgaon*, on the G. I. P. Railway, the station easiest of approach. But if they wish to save both money and the long journey from Jalgaon to Ajanta, they can proceed further to *Pachora* and take the train for *Pahur* on the Pachora-Jamner Railway. The journey from Jalgaon to Ajanta would be about 37 miles, whereas the journey from Pahur to Ajanta would be only about 13 miles.

Visitors from Madras, Hyderabad, Mysore and the South would be well-advised to alight at *Aurangabad* on the Nizam's Guaranteed State Railway.

Visitors from Bombay and its neighbourhood have the choice offered to them. They can proceed to Ajanta either from *Jalgaon* or from *Pahur* on the Pachora-Jamner Railway. (Pahur is only 13 miles from Ajanta.) If, therefore, the visitor takes the train from Pachora to Pahur his journey to Ajanta would be more economical. Pachora is only a few stations south of Jalgaon on the G. I. P. Railway.

For those who can afford it, the direct motor route from Jalgaon or from Aurangabad is, of course, the most convenient approach to Ajanta.

There is no *railway* route direct to or as far as Ajanta. The railway routes terminate at Jalgaon, Pahur and Aurangabad. Whatever railway route the visitor selects, his journey to Ajanta must be by motor-taxi or bullock cart from Jalgaon, Pahur or Aurangabad. Moreover, unless he wishes to finish the inspection of the caves during a day's trip, he will have to stay at Fardapur, four miles away from the Ajanta caves.

### **Residence for Visitors**

A Dak Bungalow and a Government Guest House at *Fardapur*, four miles away from the caves, provide residence for visitors. Permission to stay at the Government Guest House ought to be previously obtained from the Director of Archæology, Nizam's Dominions, Hyderabad. There is no hotel at or near Ajanta.

### **Previous Intimation**

There is at present no regular bus service from Jalgaon to Fardapur. Motor-taxis are, however, available. They can be procured by writing previously to (1) the Collector, Jalgaon (East Khandesh); or (2) to the Station Master, Jalgaon; or (3) to Mr. Syed Ahmed, Curator, Ajanta Caves (Tel. Address—Pahur, G. I. P. Railway.)

Motor-taxis from Pahur (not Pachora) to Fardapur and back can also be procured by previous intimation to the Curator.

## Taxi Fares

	Rs. as.
From Jalgaon to Fardapur and back the same day .. .. ..	40 0
Single trip either way .. .. ..	30 0
From Pahur to Fardapur .. .. ..	10 0
„ Fardapur to Pahur .. .. ..	10 0
„ Fardapur Bungalow to the caves and back .. .. ..	4 8

Visitors from Jalgaon, just for a day's trip, can proceed directly to the caves in the cars engaged by them at the specified rates without any extra charge. The Curator should in that case be previously informed.

## Bullock Carts

	Rs. as.
Fare for a bullock cart from Fardapur Bungalow to the caves and back ..	2 0
Fare for a bullock cart from Fardapur to Pahur or from Pahur to Fardapur Bungalow .. .. .. ..	2 8

## Charges

At either the Dak Bungalow or the Government Guest House, Fardapur, the tariff for meals is—

	Rs. as.
Breakfast .. .. .. ..	1 8
Lunch .. .. .. ..	2 0
Dinner .. .. .. ..	3 0
Coffee .. .. .. ..	0 3
Tea .. .. .. ..	0 2

The Curator of the caves should be informed previously in regard to boarding arrangements.

As food supplies at Fardapur are extremely limited, visitors would be, as a rule, well advised to make their own arrangements for food.

A pair of binoculars and an electric torch would be very helpful to the visitor eager to examine closely the paintings in the dark caves.

To illuminate the interior of the caves the authorities there provide petrol lamps on payment of about five rupees for a round of the caves.

### **Permission to Copy**

Visitors desirous of copying or photographing the frescoes or the sculptures at the caves must obtain previous permission from the Director of Archaeology, H. E. H. the Nizam's Government, Hyderabad. For rules and conditions, see Appendix.

PART I  
GENERAL INFORMATION  
(ii)  
**THE CAVES**



## Cave Numbers

The caves have been numbered consecutively purely for the convenience, it seems, of the lay visitor who enters them from the steps at the extremity of the rock at cave I. The numbers do not, therefore, indicate either their chronological order or object.

## Modern Discovery

They remained, on account of their secluded and isolated position, practically unknown to the outside world until nearly a hundred years ago, when Sir James Alexander's brief description of their wall paintings appeared in the "Transactions" of the Royal Asiatic Society. They were seen, it would appear from that reference, for the first time in 1819 by Europeans employed as officers in the Madras Army. Sir James' account was followed by another published in the Bengal Asiatic Society's Journal in 1836. The "*Bombay Courier*" published, again, in 1839, a fairly informative description of Ajanta written by Lieutenant Blake. James Fergusson, the celebrated author of the monumental works on Indian Architecture, visited the caves during the same year and, in 1843, submitted his paper entitled "Rock Cut Temples of India" to the Royal Asiatic Society.

## First Copies

He thus succeeded in attracting the interest and sympathy of the Court of Directors of the East India Company who soon appointed Major Robert Gill of

the Madras Army to execute facsimile copies of all the paintings in the caves. For more than twenty years, Major Gill devoted his time and energy to complete the series of the copies of the wall paintings of salient interest. All but five of the copies thus executed were destroyed by the fire at the Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1860. Some idea of the copies destroyed by the fire may be gained from the woodcuts published in Mrs. Spier's "Life in India." They were reproduced from the tracings of Captain Gill's copies. The five copies that survived are now to be found in the Indian Section of the South Kensington Museum.

### **Another Attempt**

In 1875, Mr. Griffiths, Principal of the Bombay School of Art, along with his students recommenced the work undertaken by Major Gill. He was busy with the work for about ten years. He despatched, during the period, one hundred and twenty-five copies of the paintings to the South Kensington Museum. Again, eighty-seven of the copies were destroyed by fire. Fifty-six of the copies by Mr. Griffiths are, at present, displayed at the Indian Section of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Two of the Griffith's copies are, I know, with the authorities of the Bombay School of Art. From the copies which survived the fire, Mr. Griffiths compiled his work, of truly monumental importance, on "The Paintings in the Buddhist Caves at Ajanta," published in 1896.

### **The Third Effort**

Lady Herringham and her colleagues, including Indian artists, completed in 1911 the third effort to

secure, on an extensive scale, the copies of the paintings. They can be seen preserved at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. They have been also reproduced in her book on the "Ajanta Frescoes."

### **Other Copies -**

Other copies of the paintings have been, at frequent intervals, produced by artists, inside and outside the country. Sjt. Mukul Dey's copies, now in the possession of Mr. Kallianji Curumsey, Bombay ; Mr. Syed Ahmed's copies, some of them kindly lent by Mr. A. Hydari and displayed at the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay ; and the copies made for the Chief of Aundh are some of the recent efforts known to me.

### **Conservation of Frescoes**

The Ajanta Caves are situated in the territories controlled by H.E.H. the Nizam's Government. The Government of the State organised, in 1914, an Archaeological Department for the specific purpose of conserving adequately the art-treasures at Ajanta. They have been assisted by Sir John Marshall, Director-General of Archaeology in India, and by the Italian expert Restaurateur, Professor Lorenzo Cecconi, who was entrusted with the technical problem of the conservation of the frescoes. It is believed that the use of the preparation and methods of conservation (advised by the latter expert) will render the paintings safe for a considerable number of years.

### **Official Publications**

The Archaeological Department is eager to provide facilities for inspection and study by artists and students as well as those interested, generally, in Indian

Art. With the assistance of M. Foucher, the celebrated French *savant*, the Department will soon publish "an authoritative account of the paintings both from the artistic and iconographic points of view." Another volume, contemplated by the Department, will supplement the description of the paintings with copies of the frescoes reproduced by the three colour process. The Department thus hopes to place, for the benefit of the student, reproductions of the original wall paintings faithful in outline and colour.

### **Popular Favour**

Captain Gladstone Solomon, the present Principal of the Bombay School of Art, has been endeavouring to follow the traditions set by Griffiths. His delightful little booklets on "The Women of the Ajanta Caves" and "Jottings at Ajanta," followed by Madame Pavlova's sensational triumph in the "Ajanta Ballet," enacted in London, have done much to bring the paintings into popular favour and esteem. Sjt. Mukul Dey's book, "My Pilgrimage to Ajanta and Bagh," may also be mentioned as another helpful publication.

### **Age of the Caves**

The twenty-nine caves at Ajanta have been cut, carved and painted at different times during a period of over seven hundred years. The earliest of them, caves IX and X, date back, it is said, to the first or second century B.C. And the latest caves, say, I and II or XXVI are assigned to the sixth or seventh century A.D. The oldest caves form the low centre of the series from I to XXIX.

## Their Site

The rock-shrines of Ajanta are situated, about four miles North of the village of that name, on one of the Ghats which marks the boundary of the Deccan table-land as distinguished from that of Khandesh alongside the valley of the river Tapti. Their site has been selected with the care and attention which almost invariably distinguishes the work of ancient temple-builders. The quiet secluded spot chosen by the Buddhist monks is testimony to the nature-worship which soothed and stimulated their religious activities, the nature-worship which could be seen in all abundance in the paintings and carvings of their temples. The semi-circular scarp of rock, nearly 250 feet high, in which they have been cut, carved and decorated with paintings, the verdant slopes of the rocks opposite and the "*sat kund*" cascade vivacious at one end of the ravine terminating at the other as the gentle sinuous Waghora stream and mimicking the leisurely movement of clouds and the luminous blue of the skies, disclose for them a setting of dramatic intensity irresistible.

## Nature's Craftsmanship

At a point somewhere near, or rather opposite, cave XVI, the majestic amphitheatre of the caves reveals the full glory of its design. Nature's supreme craftsmanship was not lost on the master-builders of these temples. The elephants, still entangled and half-hidden under the débris of centuries, carved on each side of the entrance gate underneath cave XVI, and the statue of the beautifully poised *Naga*.

*Raja* on the landing of the stairs leading upwards towards its verandah, indicate the manner in which they emphasised the important points in Nature's composition. The entrance, thus decorated and distinguished, was, in all probability, the ancient original approach to the shrines, not the present entrance at the western extremity of the rock. For, it is from the rock just opposite cave XVI, that a crescent sweep unfolds the panoramic grandeur of the series of temples and monasteries which still safeguard the galleries of living art and culture and renew faith in human civilisation.

### **Their Classification**

They have been classified, broadly, as *Chaityas* and *Viharas*. The *Chaitya* caves are those with the stupa, the central domed shrine, containing or supposed to contain the relics of *Bhagwan Buddha*. The *Vihara* caves may be described as monasteries. The *Chaityas* were meant for common worship only. The *Viharas* were used for residence as well. Caves IX, X, XIX and XXVI are *Chaityas* (Pls. IX to XIII). The remaining are *Viharas* (Pls. XIV to XXII).

### **Important Peculiarities**

The rock-temples and monasteries at Ajanta possess many noticeable and important peculiarities. A considerable number of the rock-cut temples of Western India command, as a foreground, pleasant and beautiful glimpses of open country. Those at Ajanta are, however, hemmed in in an isolated hill-cleft and confronted with the massive slopes of the rocky scarp opposite. The religious edifices at

Ajanta are, moreover, particularly noticeable for their unity of purpose. They have been, all of them, excavated solely for the religious needs of Buddhism. Vestiges of neither Hinduism nor Jainism can be found there.

Another important feature is to be found in the fact that they afford, excavated as they have been during the whole of the period of over seven hundred years when Buddhism developed and declined in this country, unusual opportunity and material to students of art and religion, philosophy and culture.

### **Pilgrims on the Quest**

At no other single spot in India is such a complete record of the religious, artistic, social or civic concepts and customs of the Buddhist times to be discovered as the one traceable in the paintings, sculpture and architecture of the secluded and compact series of caves at Ajanta. Is not the seclusion and the very compactness of the caves eloquently suggestive of the atmosphere of peace and serenity essential for the student of art and religion, life and culture? Here he re-discovers the true atmosphere and setting for a live university of creative culture. Remote from the noise and petty distractions of the "exist-for-the-moment" world, he begins to discern and examine dispassionately the human cravings which foster dissensions or brotherhood. Ajanta has continued to maintain its significance for the pilgrims, ancient and modern, on the spiritual quest, which is neither ancient nor modern, only human and, consequently, eternal.

## Method of Painting

Griffiths distinguishes thus the method of mural painting in Ajanta with that adopted in Europe. The Indian practice of wall-painting at Ajanta, as elsewhere, is, he says, "in fact a combination of tempera with fresco. The colours are ground with rice or linseed-water with a little coarse molasses (*gur*) and water only is used in painting. Then, when the painting is completed, it is again rubbed over with the same small trowel..... It is considered absolutely necessary that the work should be kept damp from beginning to finish, so that the plaster is not allowed to set until the completion of the picture. When once the smoothly trowelled surface is dry, it bears a distinct sheen or gloss and the colours withstand washing. Between the methods of modern India and that employed at Ajanta, the only difference is that instead of a first coat of mortar, a mixture of clay, cow-dung, and pulverised trap rock was first applied to the walls and thoroughly pressed into its surface, when the small cavities and air-holes peculiar to volcanic rock and the rough chisel marks left by the excavators served as keys. In some instances, especially in the ceilings, rice husks were used. This first layer—which according to our modern notions—promises no great permanence, was laid to a thickness varying from one-eighth to three-quarters of an inch, and on it an egg-shell coat of fine white plaster was spread." He points out that the outline was usually put in first in brown or black and the focal colour was filled in flat washes, on which the details were painted. Lady Herringham mentions

also the first outline in red. Griffiths finds no parallel in the Italian frescoes of the process and technique employed at Ajanta. But he finds they resemble the old Egyptian method of wall paintings. He believes that the "exceeding simplicity of the Indian and Egyptian methods" have "ensured a durability denied to more recent attempts executed with all the aids of modern chemical science."

### **Inscriptions**

Old inscriptions, twenty-five in number, have been traced, seventeen painted on the walls of the interior and eight cut on the exterior of the rocks.

### **New Conclusions**

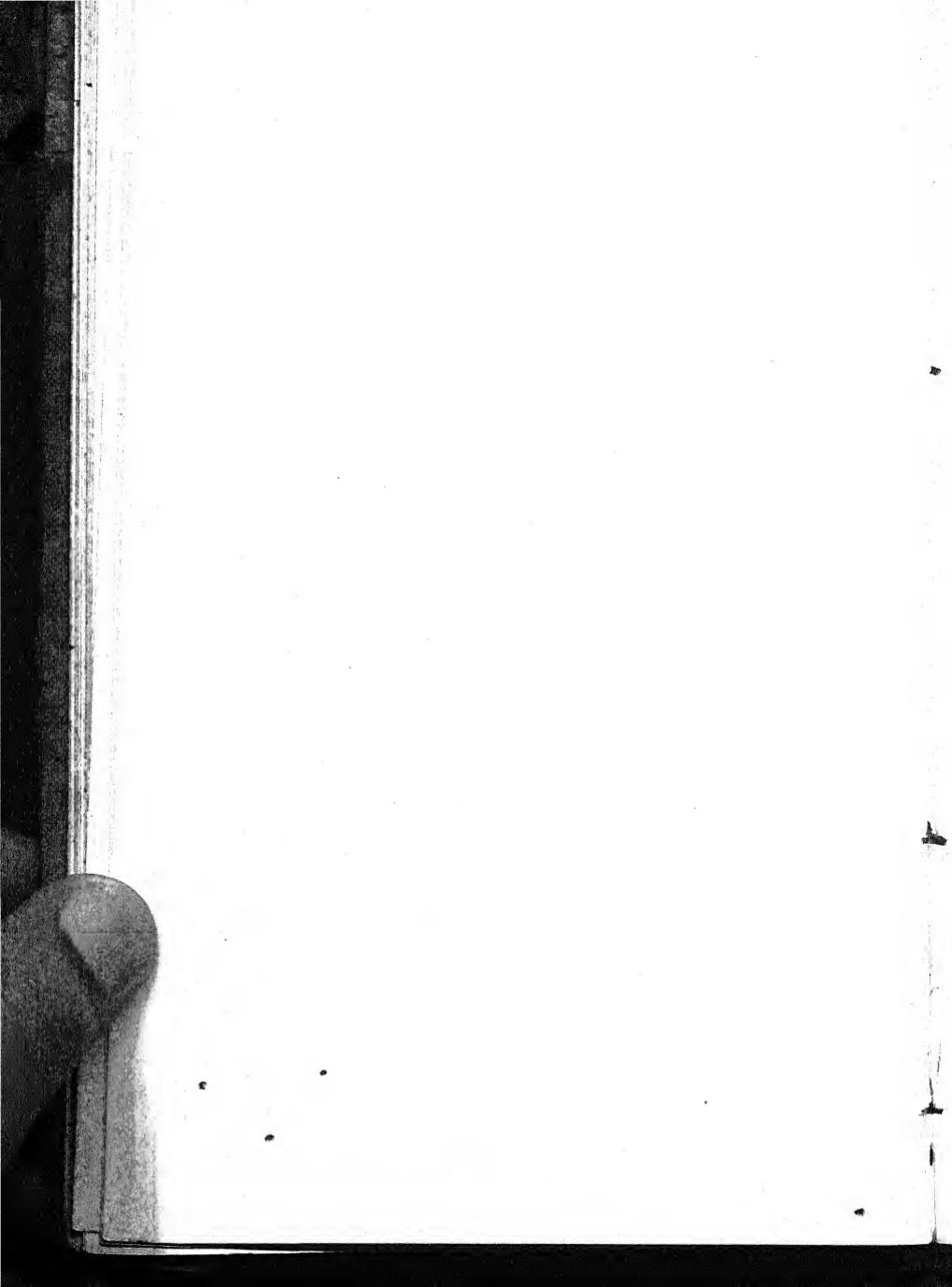
M. Victor Goloubew, the celebrated Russian *savant*, in the newly published volume on the "Paintings in Ajanta, cave I," the 10th volume of the "Ars Asiatica," maintains that they are true frescoes, a *fresco buono*, as the Italians term it, not tempera, as has been usually suggested, although some of them seem to him evidently retouched later. Gold was used, he says, neither for hallows or jewellery. The shading employed in the paintings was not, he asserts, modeling, only an accentuation of important points by darker line.

### **The Most Important Caves**

The visitor interested, generally, in Indian Art, who cannot spare more than a day at Ajanta, will find caves I, II, IX, X, XII, XVI, XVII, XIX and XXVI sufficiently representative of the paintings, sculpture and architecture preserved at Ajanta.

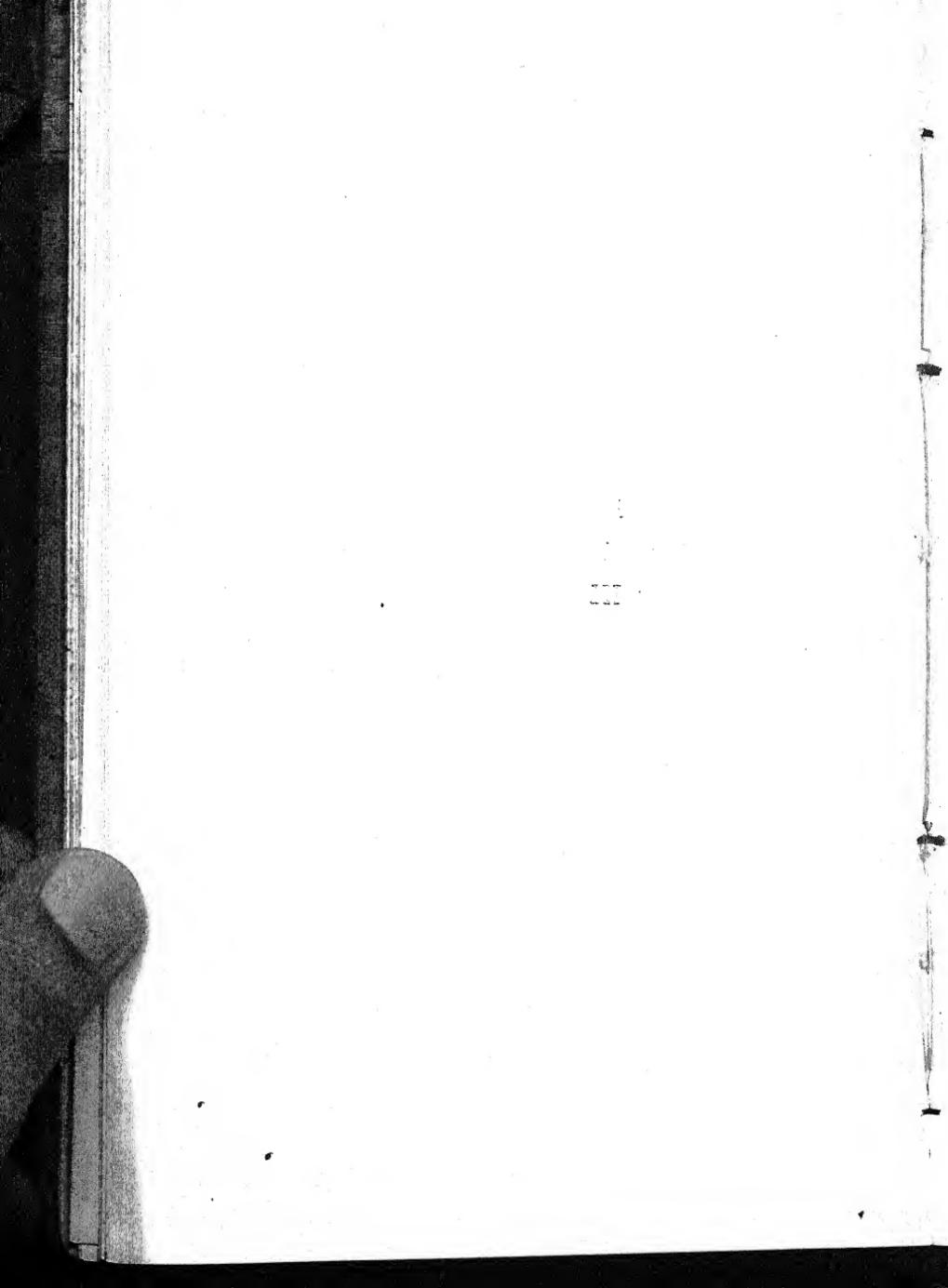


PART II  
**PAINTINGS**



**Main Caves of Interest**

CAVE I	CAVE X
CAVE II	CAVE XVI
CAVE IX	CAVE XVII



" I was not outcast. Still, though by a thread fine as that by which a spider hangs from the rafters, my being was suspended from the habitations of eternity. I long to throw my arms about the hills to meet with kisses the lips of the seraph wind. I felt the gaiety of childhood springing up through weariness and age, for to come in contact with that which is eternally young is to have that childhood of the spirit it must attain ere it can be moulded by the Magician of the Beautiful and enter the House of Many Mansions."

—A.E.

" Wherever a fresco peels and drops,  
Wherever an outline weakens and wanes

Till the latest life in the painting stops,  
Stands One whom each fainter pulse-tick pains

One, wishful each scrap should clutch its brick,  
Each tinge not wholly escape the plaster."

—*Robert Browning*

Browning's lament was aroused by the condition of the "Old Pictures in Florence." A communion, direct and unhesitating, with the conceptions and spirit of works of art of universal appeal is an experience rare indeed. And, Browning's pain is an experience inevitable for all those who have learnt to discern in Art the spiritual struggles and achievements of mankind. For them, there is no other measure save Art. For them, there is no other discovery save the one revealed in its immortal manifestations. For them, there is no other attitude save that of the student eager to understand, not to impose or prove.

## Eternally Young

Ajanta vitalises the "pulse-ticks" of the heart. The heart discovers there its strength, its unfathomed powers. It dares stand free and unashamed. The crutches drop, one by one, imperceptibly, phantom views and values, outlook and attitudes, gestures, partisanships and prejudices. It comes in contact with that which is eternally young. It attains the "childhood of the spirit." The usual tokens lose currency. Useless to explode in adjectives. Useless to recall the ancient date or age of the caves or of the paintings. Useless to apply the catch phrases which classify and test works of art as so many bottled or tinned specimens.

## Majesty of Art

The more prepared the more unprepared you feel, confronted with the direct, unsophisticated, irresistible appeal of the living masterpieces on the temple walls of Ajanta. The most scholarly account or information, the most accurate version in tracings, copies or photographs, essay only the approach to the approximate and serve only to complete your silent amazement and admiration. The mind undistracted and, for once, truly free from its habitual bondage reaches the pause or the contemplative mood eagerly awaiting to "learn what great conceptions can." What could be more inevitable, what could be more completely significant of the unchallenged and unchallengeable power of the live majesty of Art? The perennial fountain of sublimity at Ajanta could not be checked, submerged or even circumscribed by the pebbles ingeniously

discovered and arranged by scholarship that would vainly classify but cannot describe, much less guide, or inspire. Every gramophonized recitation about Indian Art seems at Ajanta as attractive or significant as the wild chatter of the monkeys in its valleys.

### **Undistracted Art**

We enter cave IX, one of the oldest of the series, *Cave IX.* and, underneath the wide entablature over the columns discover, on a narrow strip, fragments of painting which carry our minds centuries back to the times when Art found, as it will always find, its substance and glory in the simple incidents of daily life. The spirited and decisive delineation, on the frieze, of the running cowherd joyously following the vivacious romp of the cattle and the wild animals, was not an insignificant incident for the Ajanta artist. Only a few paces off the caves can be found to-day the scene and the subject which his undistracted art immortalised thousands of years ago. With the minimum of significant lines and pure harmonious colour, he won and secured artistic values well-nigh impossible for the moderns who substitute sophistry for life and technique for the end, not the means, of Art. The row of the austere figures of Buddha on the columns, the scenes depicted on the walls at the back and the fragments of painting over the window, on the right of the front wall—believed to be the only surviving example of true fresco at Ajanta—all display the difference the artist observed in the treatment, at different times, of different themes and purposes.

## Secular Life

*Cave X.* Turn now to the adjoining cave X, the largest of the *Chaityas*. Behind the row of Buddhas on the columns, similar to the row in Cave IX, will be found a frieze on the walls at the back revealing figures and groups noticeable as much for their historic as for their artistic interest. They greatly resemble, without doubt, the *Bhils* and *Brinjaris* and similar gypsy or aboriginal tribes and types. No other cave at Ajanta contains paintings of figures with the physiognomy and costumes identical with those marked in the groups on this frieze. Here, again; the artist offers, with unmistakable fidelity and truth, the picture, as he saw it, of secular life visualised by the folks around him. A king and queen or, may be, a feudal lord and lady, with their retinue grouped with simple dignity attract our attention, despite the irritating obscurity of the layers over the painting.

## Beyond Conventions

*Cave XVI.*

A considerable number of the paintings, now left on the walls of Ajanta, portray, no doubt, the "Jatak" stories dealing with incidents in the previous incarnations and legends associated with *Bhagwan Buddha*. And the poems in the paintings are not infrequently accentuated with certain uniform conventions. They are no more than accents. They are not the substance of the paintings. Can any intelligent observer fail to recognise in the painting on the left wall inside cave XVI, generally described as the "Dying Princess," the indisputable perfection of workmanship accom-

plished by the artist trained by centuries of discipline, national, religious and artistic ?

Was not the power, hard-won and preserved by generations of artists, necessary for the masterpiece which, at the first glance, scatters all our preconceived notions and obsessions ? The last flicker, almost extinct, of life in the helpless abandon of the "Dying Princess," the infinite anguish in the lowering eyes which terminate her earthly sight and vision, the affectionate farewell in the drop, like the fall of a feather, of the fingers on the arm of the girl by her side, whose unbelieving eyes and enquiring fingers vainly question the shocking calamity, and, finally, the piteous droop of the limbs sliding towards the arm which, now withdrawn in defeat, proclaims the triumph of death, communicate instantly untold grief, reflected in the attitudes and expressions of the attendants around the Princess, to every spectator of the sad drama. Can any formula, any convention, interpret it ? Of this painting Griffiths rightly says : "for pathos and sentiment and the unmistakable way of telling its story, this picture, I consider, cannot be surpassed in the history of Art. The Florentines could have put better drawing, and the Venetians better colour, but neither could have thrown greater expression into it."

### **Conventions as Interludes**

Episodes in life are not isolated from Life. When the Ajanta artist narrates, he narrates in regular sequence and continuity of the compositions on the vast scale of the spaces of the walls. No wonder he

needs the pauses, or the interludes, he obtains from the conventions he employs indicative of, say, the rank of the figures or suggestive of the rivers, the sea, the interior and exteriors of buildings, doors and gateways, pavilions and balconies or expressive of the summit and sides of hills and mountains. Their significance can be easily understood. For, wherever the hill-side is depicted as patterned cubes or rather as chequer assemblage of bricks, the representation of dark hill-tribes, with their bows and arrows and shields or spears, of the birds, monkeys and wild animals, of trees and torrents, or of the "*Kinnaras*" —the musicians of the mountain gods fabled to possess human features with tails and legs similar to those of birds—interspersed between and around the cubes, make the meaning of the composition clear. The gay jumping of the fish, the arrangement of the "*shankhas*," and usually a boat, elucidate the purpose of the otherwise "fantastic" treatment of the streams, rivers and the sea. A "*dwarpal*" standing or leaning against the door or the gate, or a person passing in or out of it, easily suggest the meaning of the structures.

### **Rank and Costume**

The rank or class of the person represented in the paintings may be, without great difficulty, guessed from the shape and number of his jewellery. Persons of the highest rank are adorned, generally, with the largest amount of jewellery. Kings, queens, and, as a rule, those who have been assigned some sort of princely or divine distinction wear "*mukutas*" or crowns. The number of the garments vary, on the contrary,

in inverse ratio to their rank. Their diaphanous and rich texture is, however, a distinction. Ascetics and monks, or "bhikkus," can be recognised by their long robes and the absence on their person of jewellery. The flowing and coloured garments, usually, distinguish the dancing girls. Domestic servants, men and women, can be identified by their position in the composition and, generally, by the paucity of their ornaments and the number and rough texture of their garments.

### **"Jatakas"**

Cave XVI contains, at present, only a few fragments of the paintings narrating the "Jatak" stories. The stories and incidents, as painted on the walls, have not been, it may be mentioned, yet completely identified. M. Foucher, the celebrated French *savant*, has been recently entrusted with the task by the Archæological Department of H. E. H. the Nizam's Government. The *Jatakas*, "Sutsoma" and "Conversion of *Nanda*" have been identified.

The "Sutsoma Jatak," painted on the right-side of the front corridor inside the cave, speaks of the cannibal robber who seized *Sutsoma*, king of Indrapatta and a *Bodhisattava*, while he was coming out after a bath in a lotus tank. The robber set him free on condition that he returned at day-break immediately after he heard the sacred verses from a Brahmin and made his usual offerings to the One who preached the Law. *Sutsoma*, the Great Being, fulfilled the condition. Eventually the robber adopted the faith of the *Bodhisattava* who could thus impress him

with his deeds and inspire him with sacred teaching.

"The Conversion of *Nanda*," shown on the wall of the side corridor on the left, depicts the manner in which *Nanda*, brother of *Bhagwan Buddha*, was brought to the faith.

### Episodes from Life

Cave XVI contains, judged from the present conditions, a majority, it would seem, of paintings related to episodes in the life of one whom we now know as *Bhagwan Buddha*—not the "Jatak" episodes form his previous incarnations. The paintings on the wall of the side corridor opposite show the birth of *Bhagwan Buddha*, the reading of the horoscope by the old *Rishi Asita*, Buddha in school, his first meditation, and his first visit to Rajgriha : his famous four drives in the city which brought him knowledge of and contact with Disease, Poverty, Old Age and Death and, lastly, offerings of *Sujata* and of *Trapussa* and *Bhallika*.

It was *Rishi Asita* who prophesied the divine mission of the child-prince whom the world has now learnt to recognise as *Bhagwan Buddha*. When at school, the child showed his knowledge of the systems of writing, unknown even to his *guru Viswamitra*. His grief at the sight of oxen bleeding under the terrible burden and strain of the yoke and plough, drove him to his first meditation underneath a "*jambu*" tree. King Bimbisara once offered the Prince, who had renounced the world and his rights and position, half of his kingdom if he gave up the monk's robe and life. He was refused. But he was promised that the first visit, after the monk had attained Enlightenment,

would be to his city. The visit to Rajgriha was the fulfilment of that promise.

Before the Prince, who was now an ascetic, attained Buddhahood, he examined and thought about the various systems of prevalent belief and thought. He performed numerous forms of penance and austeries enjoined by them. He gave them up, ultimately as futile. And, he began to take his food. Sujata, a village girl, was the first to help the great "sadhu" break his long fast. The food was accepted by him as a good omen. Similarly, when *Bhagwan Buddha*, after the seven days' trance, following his Enlightenment, was in need of food, he was offered honey and wheat by *Trapussa* and *Bhallika*, merchants from Orissa, whose caravan was, at the time, passing by the sacred spot.

It is sad to think that the paintings in this cave are nearly imperceptible. For, the majority of paintings, dealing with, what were, in all probability, historic incidents in the life of *Bhagwan Buddha*, suggest in their composition an intellectual refinement and order, an inter-relationship between the effective simplicity of its architecture and the paintings on the walls, of great significance to the students of the principles of artistic composition and design.

### Lavish Profusion

The lavish profusion of the paintings on the walls and ceilings of the verandah and of the hall and corridors of cave XVII, offers the student nearly inexhaustible materials. The "Sansar Chakra" or the "Wheel of Life," painted on the wall on the extreme

Cave  
XVII.

left of its verandah, has given it its name as the "Cave of the Zodiac." On the adjacent wall has been painted the exquisite dalliance, not an unusual theme at Ajanta, of a Princely Couple reclining on a cushion and a *gadi*, in a palace pavilion. Nearby, a queen, with her attendants, stands in an attitude of unmistakable dignity. And, the window over them shows two women in meditative mood. (Pl. I.)

### **Flying "Gandharvas" and "Apsaras"**

The group just above (Pl. II) shows the flight of "gandharvas" and "apsaras," celestial musicians and dancers. Dr. Burgess, author of one of the standard books, "The Cave Temples of India," expresses universal appreciation when he says that the paintings of the flying figures, a common subject for the Buddhist sculptor, "whether we look at its purity of outline, or the elegance of the grouping, it is one of the most pleasing of the smaller paintings at Ajanta and more nearly approaches the form of art found in Italy in the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries than any example there. The easy upward motion of the whole group is rendered in a manner that could not easily be surpassed."

### **"Shaddanta Jatak"**

On the right wall of the verandah can be seen the mad elephant, sent for his destruction by his cousin *Devadatta*, tamed by *Bhagwan Buddha*. Inside the cave on the wall on the right of the front corridor is painted the "Shaddanta Jatak" and the "Maha Kapi Jatak." The *Shaddanta* suggests the capture in the Himalayas of the "lord of the elephants"



A Princely Couple



Flying "Gandharvas" and "Apsaras"

whose tusks "emitted six-coloured rays." He was captured near lake Shaddanta, by order of the Queen of Benares who desired to be avenged for a fancied insult to her, in a previous incarnation, by one who was now "lord of the elephants." The tusks of the captured elephant could not, however, be cut by her *shikaris*. But the elephant, who was a *Bodhisattava*, volunteered to pull them out himself and offered them to the Queen's *shikaris*. As soon, however, as the Queen saw them, she repented the deed and soon died of grief. The *shikari* with the tusks, the women busy administering soothing drugs and the self-contempt of the repentant and dying Queen are the congenial themes in which the Ajanta artist displays effectively his artistic competence. (Pl. III.)

The "Maha Kapi Jatak" indicates the leader, a *Bodhisattava*, of a group of monkeys endeavouring to protect his followers from the attack by the king of Benares.

### **"Brahamin Jujaka"**

On the wall of the side corridor, on the left, is delineated the "Visvantara Jataka." Visvantara was of the royal house of Sibi. His motto or rather his mission in life was to give. He gave away everything to the needy, his money as well as the elephant with costly trappings of untold value, the elephant who brought, by the magic powers with which he was endowed, rain to the kingdom of Kalinga. The gift of the elephant enraged the drought-stricken people of Kalinga. And, the King had to banish Prince Visvantara, his wife Madri, and their children. But Visvantara

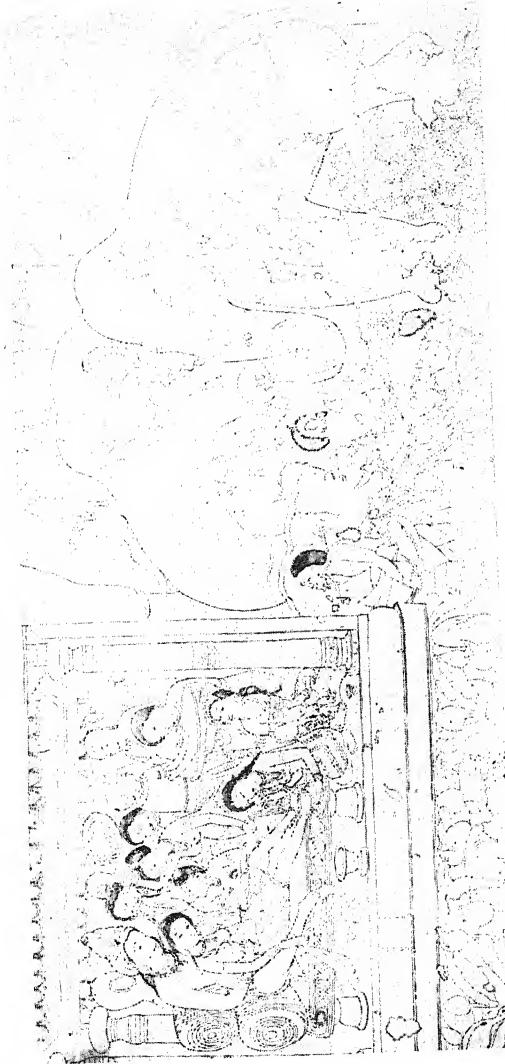
persisted. He offered to the Brahmans the horses of the chariot, meant for his journeys during the exile, as a gift. At last, a Brahmin, *Jujaka* by name, approached him and asked for the gift of his children. The gift was not denied him. (Pl. IV) *Brahmin Jujaka*, as painted on the walls, is a perfect portrait. His vicious looks and cruel demeanour need no further comment.

The “*Sutsoma Jatak*” on the wall on the left of the corridor at the back, refers to the story mentioned on page 31. On the wall to the left of the antechamber to the shrine, are shown *Sariputra* and the religious assembly listening to the sermon by the Master. *Sariputra*, considered to be the wisest in the assembly, is questioned and examined by the Master, who thus desires to demonstrate to the assembly “the quality of his wisdom.”

### **Grandeur and Tenderness**

Nearby, on the right, is the painting of “Mother and Child” (Frontispiece) and *Bhagwan Buddha*, the painting that has won admiration from every discerning student of art. Mr. E. B. Havell, the well-known exponent of Indian art, considers the painting as of the same high standard and value as those of the best examples of Buddhist art seen at Borobodur in Java. He says that, “in its exquisite sentiment it is comparable with the wonderful madonnas of Giovanni Bellini.” Professor Lorenzo Cecconi adds that in “these two figures the design of their heads and their expression are admirably exquisite. The poses of these heads in the direction of the figure of Buddha,

“Shaddanta Jatak”



III

Cave XVII



"Brahamin Jujaka"

recall to mind that purity of form which one encounters in the schools of Umbria and Tuscany of our most eminent *Quattrocentists*. This painting is, perhaps, less developed than that of Buddha, but its pictorial qualities bring it to the first rank ; in fact, its painter must have been an artist indeed, well versed in the principles of sound art ; because of the fact of the perspective of the mouths, of the eyes, and of the other parts perfectly harmonising with the whole subject, and with the heads, the hands and even the very fingers true to reality and drawn with a most precise design." Mr. Laurence Binyon, the renowned student of Eastern art, calls it "one of the most unforgettable things" of the groups of paintings in Ajanta. He remembers "no picture anywhere more profoundly impressive in grandeur and in tenderness."

### **"*Matriposhak Jatak*"**

On the wall to the right of the corridor, at the back, is shown the "*Sarabha Jatak*," where, the King of Benares is saved from a deep pit, by a stag, a *Bodhisattava*, whom he attacks.

Close to it is the "*Matriposhak Jatak*," the *Bodhisattava*, as an elephant, protects his blind mother on mount Chandrona, and saves the life of a *shikari* who betrays him, however, to King Brahmadatta of Benares. He is captured by the King who provides him with food, delicacies and trappings befitting the rank of his state elephant. The elephant refuses to take food. "Without my mother," he said, "I will not eat." He was released and returned to

protect his blind mother. The joy of the returning elephant who rushes homewards towards his mother has not only been shown but has been, it is clear, felt as well by the artist who painted him.

### **“*Syama Jatak*”**

The “*Matsya Jatak*,” shown close by, refers to the story of the *Bodhisattava* who, as a fish, prayed for and obtained rain for the fish in the stream threatened with extinction.

The “*Syama Jatak*,” beside it, deals with the story of *Syama* the *Bodhisattava* who, as the son of a *shikari*, protects his blind and helpless parents. He was shot by the King of Benares, who mistook him for a deer, near the edge of a pond where he had gone to fetch water for his blind parents. The piteous lament of the dying son for his helpless parents brought him the assistance of a goddess who was moved to restore the sight to his parents and life to their devoted son.

### **A Vast Composition**

The “*Simhala Avadana*,” hitherto recognised as the “Landing of *Vijaya* in Ceylon,” painted on the big wall, on the right, side corridor, depicts the exploits of *Simhala*, his shipwreck, his gay life with the *Rakshasis*, his interment, his escape on the flying white horse, *Balaha*, the pursuit by the *Rakshasi* he married, the end of King *Simha Kapla*, and the return of the expedition. It is impossible to describe, without the assistance of elaborate coloured reproductions, the artistic eminence of the various subjects, handled



"Queen's Toilet"



World-famed "Bodhisattva"

with rare confidence and power in the truly vast composition of this picture. Only hours of close scrutiny could reveal, as one gazes at its sections, one by one—here in a cleared centre a fascinating group of dancers, there a dignified state entry, imposing row of elephants, infantry with lowered spears, the sacred anointment of the King in the top corner, the flying pennants which mark the procession route underneath, and the boats lined on the shore—its cumulative and overpowering effect.

Professor Cecconi calls it “a work of art of great worth for its *ensemble* of the grandiose composition. It, somehow, bears a remarkable resemblance to the works of our great Venetian artists of the Renaissance. The group of elephants proceeding towards the centre of the scene is astonishingly realistic, more than paintings; they appear in bas-relief, so great is the chiaroscuro and so perfect their modality. In their several and various poses these animals are rendered in the most perfect form.” Griffiths compares the painting for “its grade of art and the mode of treatment” to the contemporary sculpture, depicting hunting scenes, at Takt-i-Bostan, Persia.

### **Supreme Artistic Value**

The “*Sibi Jatak*,” on the wall on the right in the corner of the front corridor, refers to the story of the *Bodhisattava* who, as King *Sibi*, gave his eyes to *Sakra*, the god, who, disguised as a beggar, asked for the gift.

The “*Mrig*” and the “Bear” *jatakas*, painted on the wall on the right of the front corridor, show

the benevolent actions of the *Bodhisattava* incarnate as a deer and a bear.

Plate V shows the celebrated group, painted nearby, of a queen helped by her attendants with the mirror and the requisites necessary for the finishing touches of her elaborate toilet. Can any observer fail to notice her good-humoured grace and dignity?

Professor Cecconi considers, justly, the entrance to cave XVII, "as a thing of supreme artistic value. The small embellishment which adorns the upper portion is marvellous, as marvellous as are the eight panels which go to make up the decoration of the said entrance. These in simplicity of form and colour bring to mind the paintings of those eminent Umbrian artists who flourished in the XV century."

### **Of World-wide Fame**

*Cave I.* Cave I contains, again, some of the paintings that have obtained world-wide fame and recognition. The "*Sibi Jatak*," on the wall on the left of the front inside the cave, describes the story of the *Bodhisattava*, incarnate as King *Sibi*, who cuts off part of his body and offers the flesh to the hawk for the protection of the pigeon whom he had promised safety.

### **Purity of Style**

The majestic figure of the *Bodhisattava* (Pl. VI), on the wall on the left of the corridor at the back, near the shrine, has attracted universal appreciation. Professor Cecconi, whose close association with Ajanta entitles him to respect from all students of art, observes that the painting "evinces a surprising portrayal



"Persian Embassy"

The Punishment of a Dancing Girl



VIII

Cave II

of art on account of its pictorial qualities ; this painting, in its grandiose outlines, recalls to memory the figures of Michael Angelo in the Sistine Chapel ; while the clearness of the colour of the flesh, so true to nature, and the transparency of the shadows, are very like those of Correggio. The design and expression of the face are exceptionally surprising, the breadth of the technique, the interpretation of the shape of the hand made to realistic perfection, permit of a comparison with the two great artists of the Italian Renaissance ; the female figure (on Cover) which is on the right of the figure of Buddha presents the same simplicity and skill. The hand holding the flower is also designed with exquisite skill and elegance." The figures are, he adds, "executed in a keenly appreciative purity of style and form, coupled with a real æsthetic selection of colours true to nature ; in fact, the predominant features are the two colours, blue and red, beautifully harmonising one with the other."

### **Expressive Draughtsmanship**

"The Temptation of Buddha" on the left wall of the ante-chamber to the shrine, is, again, a large-scale composition and, as Dr. Burgess points out, "one of the most complete and graphic representations of that celebrated episode in Buddha's life." On the adjoining small wall of the shrine door can be seen, in faint lines and colours, a Buddha figure which, if examined carefully, would, I believe, be found of artistic importance and value equal, if not greater, to those attributed to the celebrated *Bodhisattava* figure on the outside wall of the ante-chamber.

The almost exasperating control of expressive draughtsmanship manifest in the profound serenity of the features obtains for the painting indeed an uncommon artistic eminence.

On the wall, in the ante-chamber of the shrine, opposite the "Temptation of Buddha," may be seen the "Miracle of Sravasti" referred to on page 43. The painting, on the wall on the right of the front corridor, is popularly recognised as the "Persian Embassy." The group of foreigners, said to be Persians, (Pl. VII) may be found on the ceiling of the verandah.

### **"Hamsa Jatak"**

*Cave II.* The fragments of painting, left on the wall of the small roof on the left of the verandah of cave II, denote the incident from the "Kshantivadi Jatak" of *Bodhisattava* who, as a Brahmin and ascetic, preached and practised the doctrine of patience. He was whipped with a thorny lash. His hands, feet and ears and nose were ordered to be cut off. He remained firm and proved at last his doctrine.

The "Hamsa Jatak" on the wall, in the left corner of the front corridor, refers to the story of the *Bodhisattava* who, as a golden goose, discoursed for a whole night on the Law for the benefit of the King and Queen of Benares.

On the wall, on the left side corridor, may be seen painted various incidents like those in cave XVI, of the life of *Bhagwan Buddha*, for example, "The Conception," "Maya's Dream," "Visit to Lumbini

Garden," "The Nativity," "The Seven Steps," and "The Decision in the *Tushita* Heaven." It was in the *Tushita* heaven that *Visvantara*, the *Bodhisattava*, decided upon Magadha (Bihar) as the place of his ultimate mission. *Maya*, Queen of Suddodhana, *Sakya* King of Magadha, dreamt of a white six-tusked elephant. The dream was interpreted by the court Brahmins as a significant forecast of the birth of a prince who would bear the thirty-two auspicious marks of unusual nobility and greatness. The prince was born in the *Lumbini* garden. *Brahma* and *Indra*, the gods, received him.

### **"The Seven Steps"**

The newly born prince, protected with an umbrella, held by *Indra*, took the seven steps. As he proceeded towards the East, he said, "I will reach the highest *Nirvanna*." As he turned Westwards, he exclaimed, "this will be my last birth." When he went towards the South, he said, "I will be the first of all creatures." Finally, as he approached the North he remarked, "I will cross the ocean of existence."

The "Miracle of *Sravasti*," on the side wall of the ante-chamber to the shrine refers to King *Prasenjit* of *Sravasti* who witnessed the many miracles by which heretics were converted to the faith. One of the miracles showed *Bhagwan Buddha* in different places at the same time.

The "Puranna Avdana," on the wall on the right of the side corridor, indicates the story of the two brothers *Puranna* and *Bhabila*, who built a sanctuary

of sandalwood in token of their gratitude, for the escape from a disaster in the sea, to *Bhagwan Buddha* who answered their prayers.

### The Human Form

Cave II contains also an appreciable number of the pictures that have obtained wide popularity. The picture of the old man, recognised popularly as the "Messenger," and of the girl leaning against the pillar, the themes for numerous reproductions, are, for example, to be found in this cave. No picture is, however, more deservedly popular than the picture on the wall at the corner on the right of the front corridor, the picture which shows a king with a drawn sword about to punish, it would seem, a recalcitrant dancing girl. The tense nervous play of the fingers of the kneeling girl seeking pardon, her attitude of utter resignation and humiliation, the throbbing slender body thrust down with panic and the huddled drapery on the floor, unfold the tragic feelings interpreted by one whose perfect art enabled him to delineate with amazing fidelity and with uncommon mastery the sad realities of life. (Pl. VIII.)

The group of women, painted in the side chapel on the right, inside the cave, has been noticed for its peculiar treatment. M. Axel Jarl says: "Figures like those of Primavera, by Boticelli, may be called the sisters of some of the female figures in Ajanta." The reference about the group in the chapel is apt.

## ESSENTIALS IN THE PAINTINGS

### Decorative Designs

It would be outside the scope of the present work to attempt an elaborate description of the decorative designs and motifs, reproduced on pages xiv, xx, 52, 64, 69, strewn with a staggering magnanimity and vigour over walls, columns, ceilings and thresholds at Ajanta. They are, Professor Cecconi rightly observes, "so many and so various in themselves as to furnish innumerable themes for decorative art."

### Of Foliage

It would be enough, for the present purpose, to remember what Griffiths says about the foliage painted for "The Miracle of *Sravasti*" in the ante-chamber of the shrine in cave I. The delicate foliage which fills in the spaces between the figures will, he points out, "give some idea of the power of those old artists as designers, and also of their knowledge of the growth of plants."

### Naturalism and Conventionalism

In the decorations on the ceiling of that cave he finds "naturalism and conventionalism so harmoniously combined as to call forth our highest admiration. For delicate colouring, variety in design, flow of line, and filling of space, I think they are unequalled. Although every panel has been thought out and not a touch in one carelessly given, yet the whole work bears the impression of having been done

with the greatest ease and freedom, not only freedom of execution, but also freedom of thought."

### **Woman at Ajanta**

Captain Gladstone Solomon has shown how, for the "Artist-Monks" of Ajanta, "all beauty was one, just as for them all life was one. There was no very great distinction therefore between physical and moral beauty, not enough to make it necessary to remove their women more than a few inches from Buddha." His tribute to the artists' "Woman-worship" is not less true than rare in the opinions, hitherto expressed, about Ajanta. The Ajanta artists did not, he remarks, "pose women, they simply copied their poses. They were content to learn from their gestures, to portray their natures. Woman had for them a decorative value, altogether too precious to be diminished by laws. She was outside the Laws of Art for she made them. They learned from her. They struggled to reproduce every turn of her head, every curve of her form, every glance of her eye. She enthralled them with her airs and graces ; enmeshed them in the mysteries of her toilet, more strongly than does the Parisienne the painter of to-day. They produced tirelessly and with a discriminating knowledge her bewildering coiffures ; they decked her in painstaking manner with the most beautiful trinkets they could devise."

### **Beauty of the World**

Nowhere else has, he adds, Woman received such a perfect and understanding homage. In spite of her obvious reality, one feels, he rightly remarks, "at Ajanta that Woman is treated not as an individual,

but as a Principle. She is there not female merely but the incarnation of all the beauty of the world. Hence with all her gaiety, her charm, her 'insouciance,' she never loses her dignity, and nowhere is she, belittled or besmirched. Everywhere in this garden of flowers, we behold the full-blown rose in its pride and perfume—nowhere the trampled lily. 'Majesty and Power' invest the Women of Ajanta."

### **Free-handed Revelry**

The separate sources of "the witchery of Ajanta" can be, he says, analysed. But the analysis would, he suggests, vary according to "the individual's standpoint, perhaps his nationality." There is, Griffiths supports him, "a free-handed revelry in the opportunities afforded to the artist of painting the manifold life he saw and knew." In this "stupendous religious work of art there has been," Professor Cecconi agrees, "no stinting of artistic powers."

### **Not Rigid Moulds**

The Ajanta artists, observes Professor Rothenstein, have "not yet crystallised into the rigid moulds we have now come to associate, often very falsely, with Indian art." It would be, therefore, both foolish and futile to attempt a rigid estimate of the paintings at Ajanta. But a brief resumé of the essentials in the paintings that have attracted the appreciation of competent observers would be useful to students of art.

### **Perfection of Line**

It should be realised at the outset that there are, as Lady Herringham has pointed out, "at least twenty

different kinds of painting" at Ajanta. But the perfection of line achieved by the Ajanta artists is apparent almost everywhere. We see, Captain Gladstone Solomon says, "Line, so far as mortal has yet discovered it; the Line that has guided Indian Art in safety for thousands of years, that will continue to guide it to even greater achievement. If Europe discovered the secret of tone values, surely it must have been the Orient that discovered Line. It is the Line that worthily encloses the *Bodhisattava* in his sublime reverie, that defines the girth of elephants, and the fierceness of lions, that flickers over flowers and plants, undulates over the bosoms of women, and twists and models a thousand incomparable items of decoration. . . . The Indian Line is flexible, pliant and amazingly expressive. Though not capable of the modulations of the Japanese, or confinable within the disciplinary limits of the 'synthetic art' of China, it is the master of both in forcefulness, independence and power of continuity. Indian Line is the golden clue to India's Art."

### Racial Character

The Ajanta artists' knowledge of "the types and positions, gestures and beauties of hands is," Lady Herringham remarks, "amazing. Many racial types are rendered; the features are often elaborately studied and of high-breeding, and one might call it stylistic breeding." There has been, she concludes, "no other really fine portrayal of a dark-coloured race by themselves."

## **Colours of Ajanta**

The colours of the paintings in Ajanta are, M. Axel Jarl observes, "deeper and often purer and the whole scale of colour is far richer than in other stucco paintings of similar dimensions (Egyptian tombs, Pompeyan houses, Italian churches, from the Middle Ages, etc.) The method of the Ajanta artists "of using colour rather in bars than in masses is," Captain Gladstone Solomon points out with great truth and insight, "as effective as it is simple, and goes far to avoid the heaviness which so often distinguishes mural paintings."

## **Composition and Perspective**

M. Axel Jarl regards the compositions of the wall-paintings as exquisite. The eye is, he adds, "directed by the main lines of the compositions towards their chief characters, which also attract our attention by their large size and by their carefully calculated position." Superhuman beings, men, animals and plants are, he says, in "true perspective in regard to lines and planes."

## **Form and Contour**

The form is, he points out, "marked by a sharp and clearly accentuated outline. The contour is so true to nature and so well done, that combined with a perfectly correct volume it gives even in cases of the most difficult contractions a perfect impression of shape even when the surface is nearly monochromatic with only a slight deepening of the colours along edges."

### The Drapery

The drapery is drawn "with a remarkable sure hand and with an astonishing knowledge of the form underneath."

### Thousand Years Ahead

The figure-style is, he maintains, "highly developed and testifies to a thorough study of the human body. Every stiffness, symmetry or mere monotony has been overcome." The perfect freedom in the painter's handling of the human body places, he asserts, "Ajanta one thousand years ahead of all other paintings we know."

### Thorough Study of Nature

He explains, as few have been able to do, the values distinctive of Indian art. Behind these masterpieces at Ajanta lies, he points out, "a great and thorough *study of nature*. . . . Everything in these pictures, from the composition as a whole to the smallest pearl or flower, testifies to depth of insight coupled with the greatest technical skill. That is what makes it possible for the artist to transcend reality, as he does so often to express what is the distinctive aim of all Oriental art, the soul, the spiritual side of existence. He does not thereby violate truth."

### Life, not Formula

Mr. Laurence Binyon says that the artists at Ajanta are at home "in the world of men and women, of animals, of red earth, green plants, the sunshine and the shadows. The most beautiful

of their paintings are taken from the *Jataka* stories, the legends of the earthly life of the Buddha in various successive existences. Here was the opportunity for grappling with rich complexity of life, and the painters availed themselves of it to the full. There is no reduction to formula. These men painted Indian life as they saw it ; and, though we feel the glow of a religious impulse behind their creations, we are above all impressed with their intuitive discovery of the beauty in natural movement, unstudied attitude, spontaneous gesture. These are seized upon with a genius for significant, expressive form. How admirable too is their sense for the character of animals and birds, the geese, the deer, above all, the elephant."

### **Not Extracts from Life**

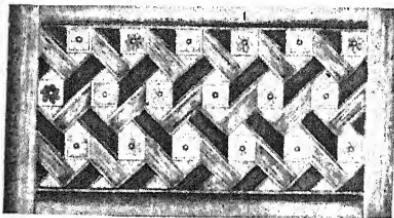
If one were to put into one word, the secret of these paintings—the secret of their continuing power to impress and charm us—one might, he replies, "well answer—*life* ; for they affect us in the same way that the living movements of men and women, children and animals affect us with a deep content and unconscious sympathy. And it is not merely a sort of extract from life that they yield—a mood of pleasure, a mood of sadness or bitterness, a mood of devotion or frivolity—it is just life itself, all life, with its joyous impulses of body and spirit, the forward stride of adventure, the haltings of the mind and turns upon itself, its abandonment to sorrow, its renunciations, its victories."

### **World Asset**

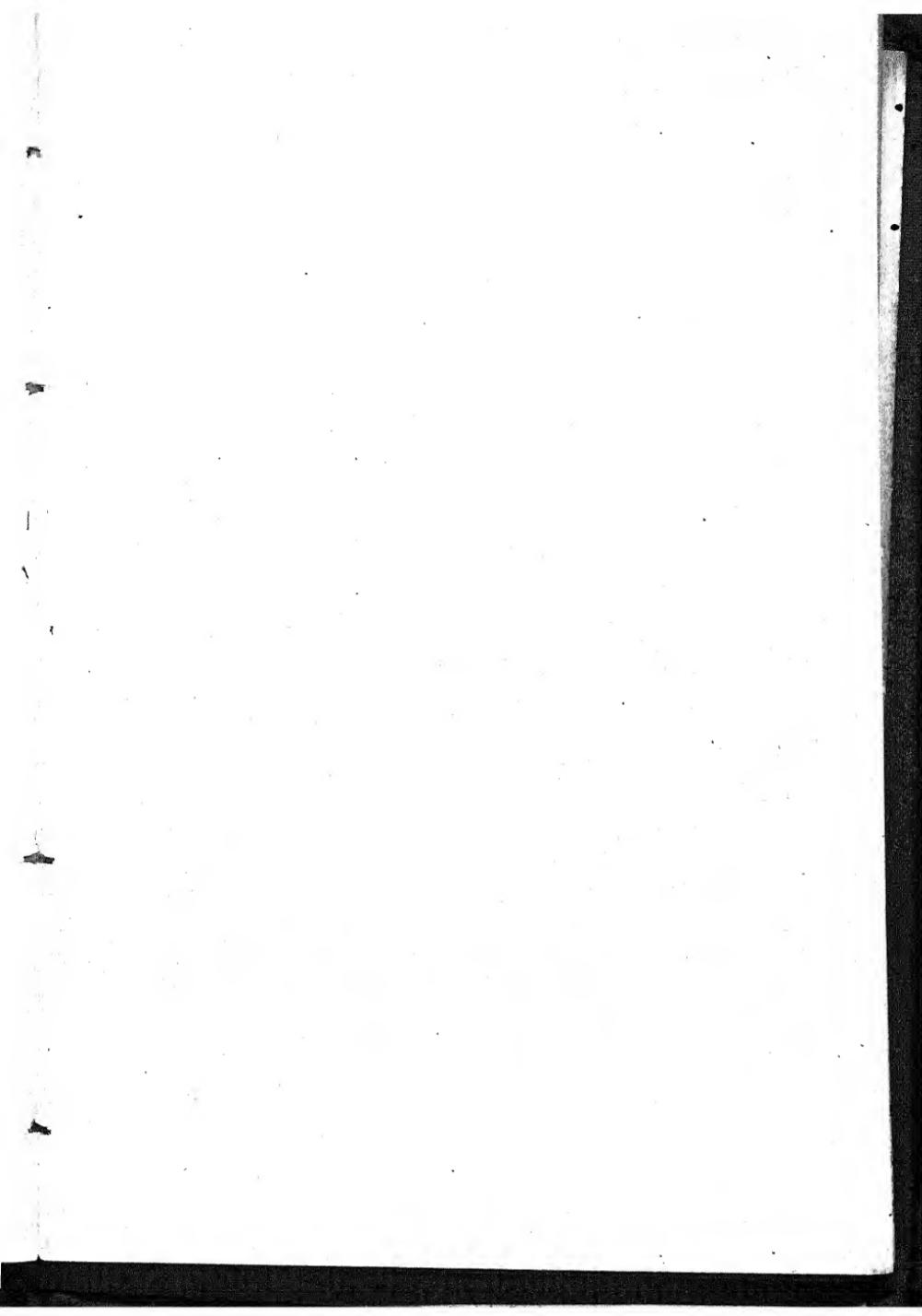
And, thus the visitor with the alert mind, growing perceptions and judgment and responsive heart, would

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in his journey backwards and forwards, from caves IX and X to cave XVII at one end and cave I at the other end, feel, as he examines with understanding admiration the episodes from folk and court life, from life secular and spiritual, from forests and palace pavilions, from festivals, social, religious and civic, from pageants and processions, song and dance, the flight of *Gandharvas* and *Apsaras*, the frolicking *Kinnaras*, birds and animals, all entwined in fascinating patterns of foliage, flower and fruit displayed in the immortal paintings on the walls, the paintings evolved by judgment and craftsmanship competent and responsive to the highest demands of Art. Mural painting has, of late, begun, once again, to recover its legitimate importance and place in modern art activities, East and West. The secrets disclosed by Ajanta are a world-asset and an inspiration for all reconstructive endeavours in art, East or West.



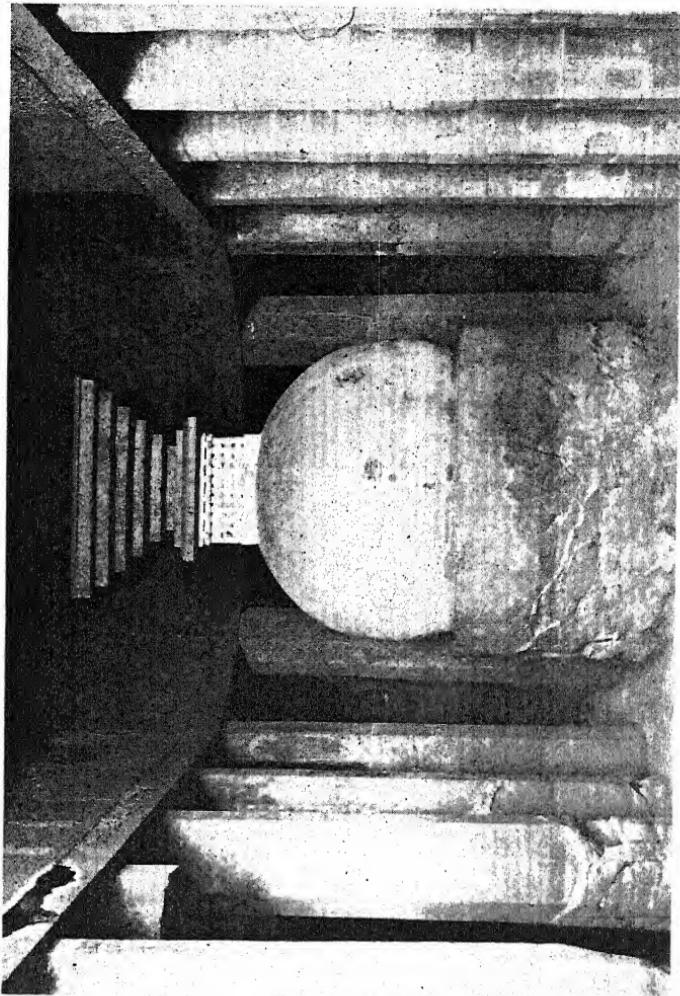
VIII—A



**"Chaitya" Interior**  
*Columns and "Stupa"*

Cave IX

IX



PART III  
**ARCHITECTURE**



## Main Caves of Interest

### *Chaitya* CAVES

CAVE IX

CAVE X

CAVE XIX

CAVE XXVI

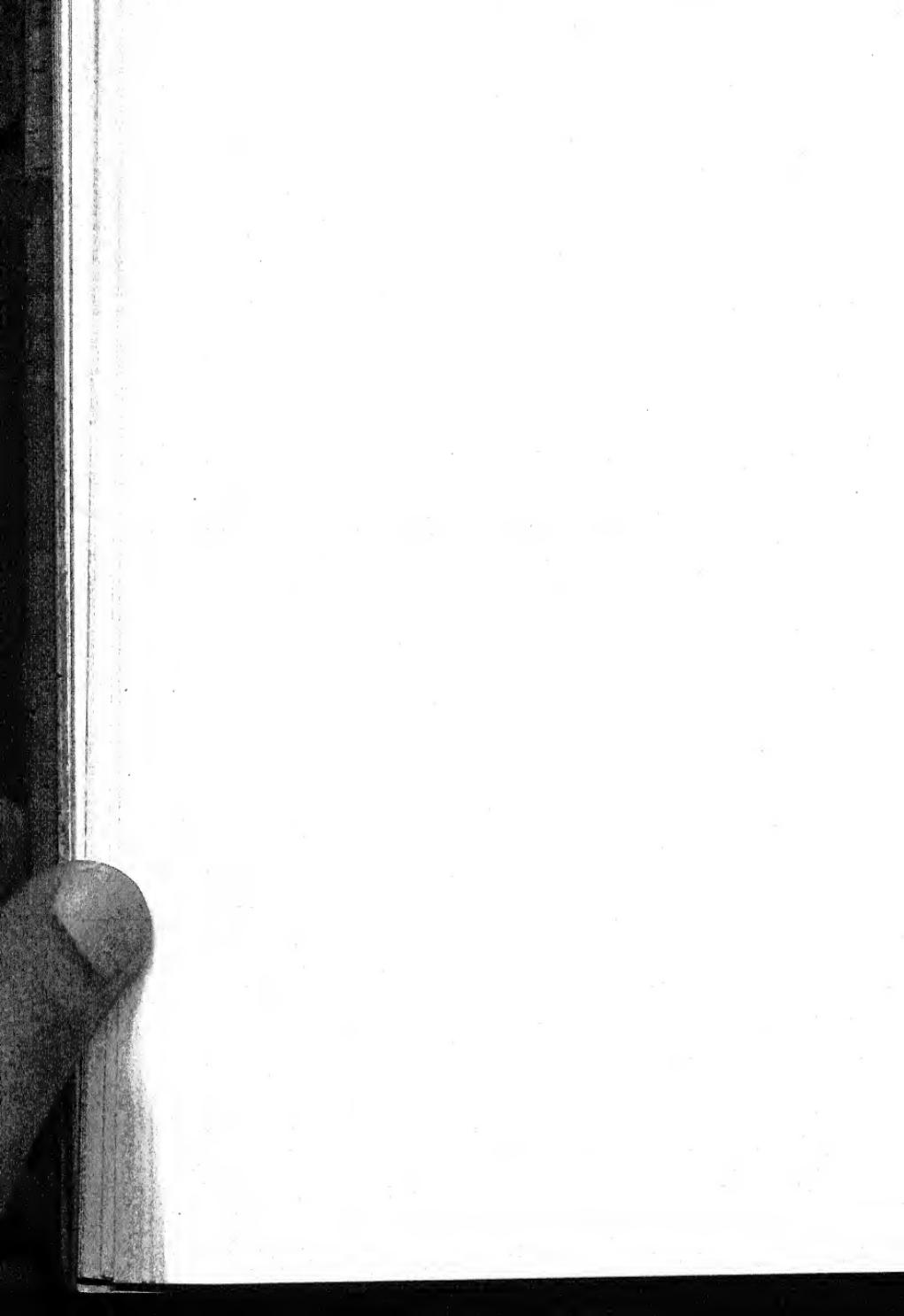
### *Vihara* CAVES

CAVE XII                  CAVE II

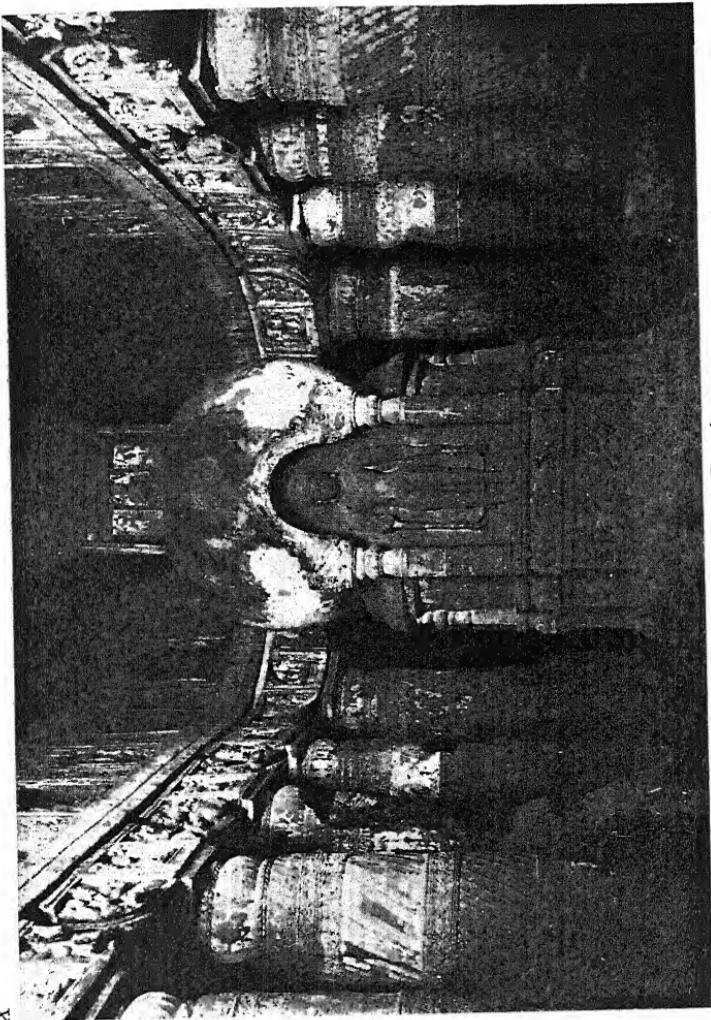
CAVE VII                  CAVE I

CAVE VI                  CAVE XVI

CAVE IV                  CAVE XX

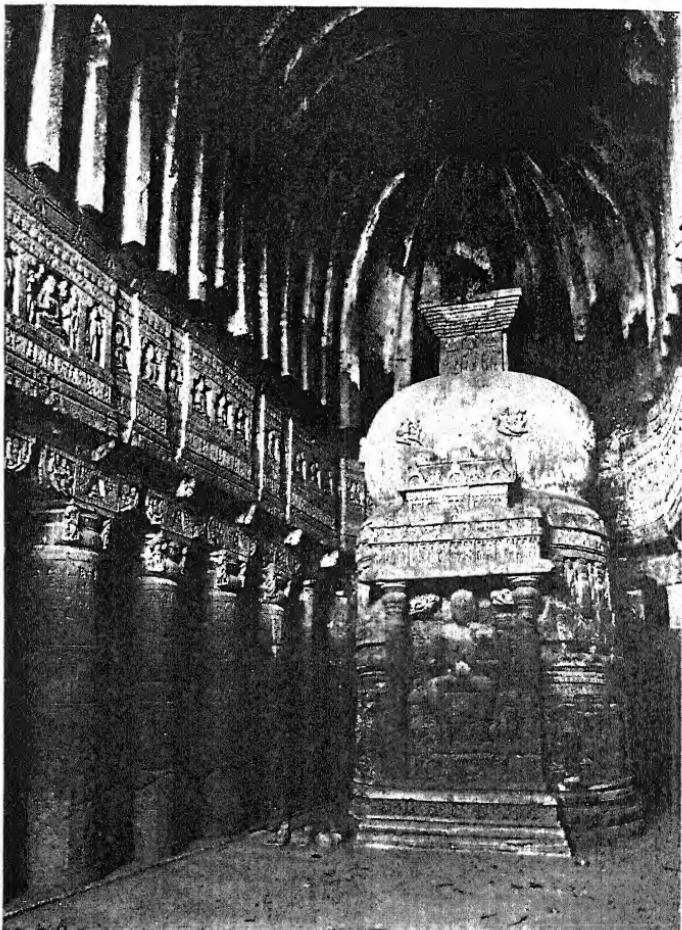


*Cave XIX*



X

**“Chaitya” Interior  
Columns, Carved Frieze and “Stupa”**



**"Chaitya" Interior**  
*Columns, Carved Frieze and "Mandap Stupa"*

“ L'architecture faisant beaucoup plus que d'élever des murs en vertu de nécessités locatives.”—(W. Cohn.)

Architecture, like almost every aspect or form and phase of the artistic heritage of India, is, even now, scarcely recognised as the subject for systematic study. The evolution of architecture in plan, construction and form is, not seldom, attributed to differences in religion or creeds, differences which, on close examination, would prove to be more apparent than real. The historic and regional aspects of architectural evolution have been very nearly overlooked by the majority of those who find it easy and convenient to classify Indian architecture by vague, overlapping, and frequently, misleading descriptions and generalisations about “ Jain,” “ Buddhist,” “ Hindu ” or “ Indo-Saracenic ” architecture. And, iconographic details, for example, not infrequently encumber and positively obstruct the right perception and judgment of architectural forms and values.

### **Salient Features—*Gupta* Period**

Few writers and exponents of Indian architecture have attempted to achieve the precision in architectural values found in the concise and very helpful statements in the “ Survey Reports ” of Cunningham. He enumerates most of the salient features of the “ *Gupta* Style.” They are, in all, six :—(1) “ flat roofs without spires, (2) prolongation of the lintel

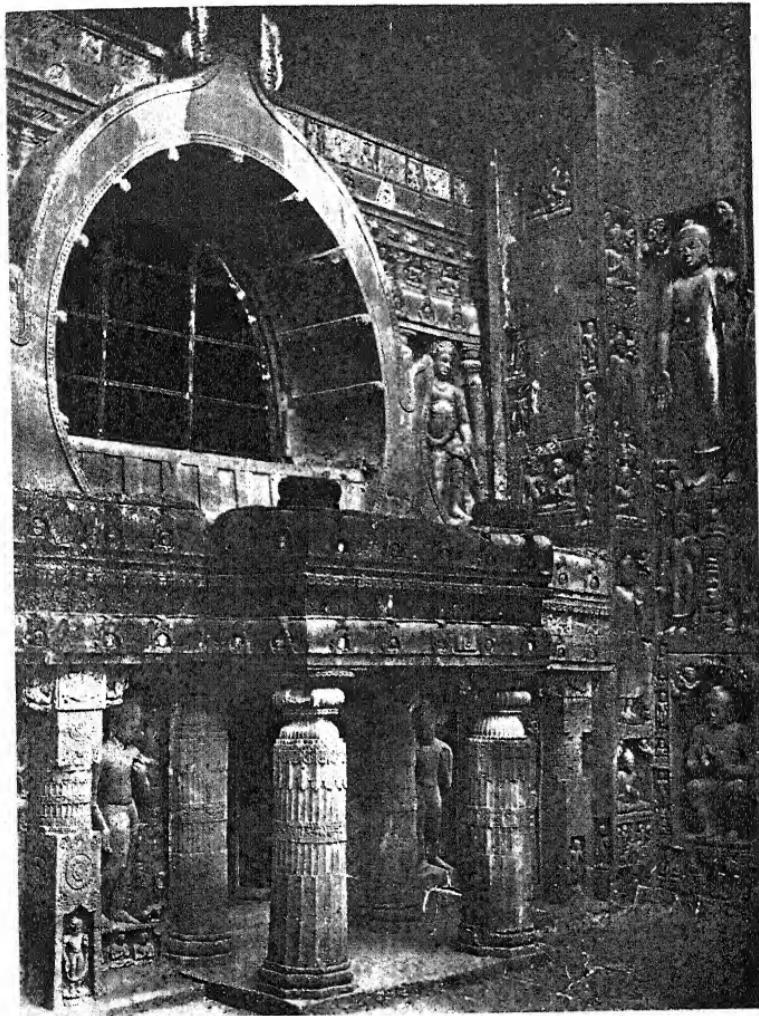
beyond the end of the jambs, (3) statues of the river goddesses, Ganges and Jumna, guarding the entrance door, (4) continuation of the architrave of the portico as a moulding all round the building, (5) pillars with massive square capitals ornamented with half-seated lions back to back with a tree between them, (6) bosses on the capitals of a peculiar form, like beehives with short side horns."

### **Pre-Gupta Period**

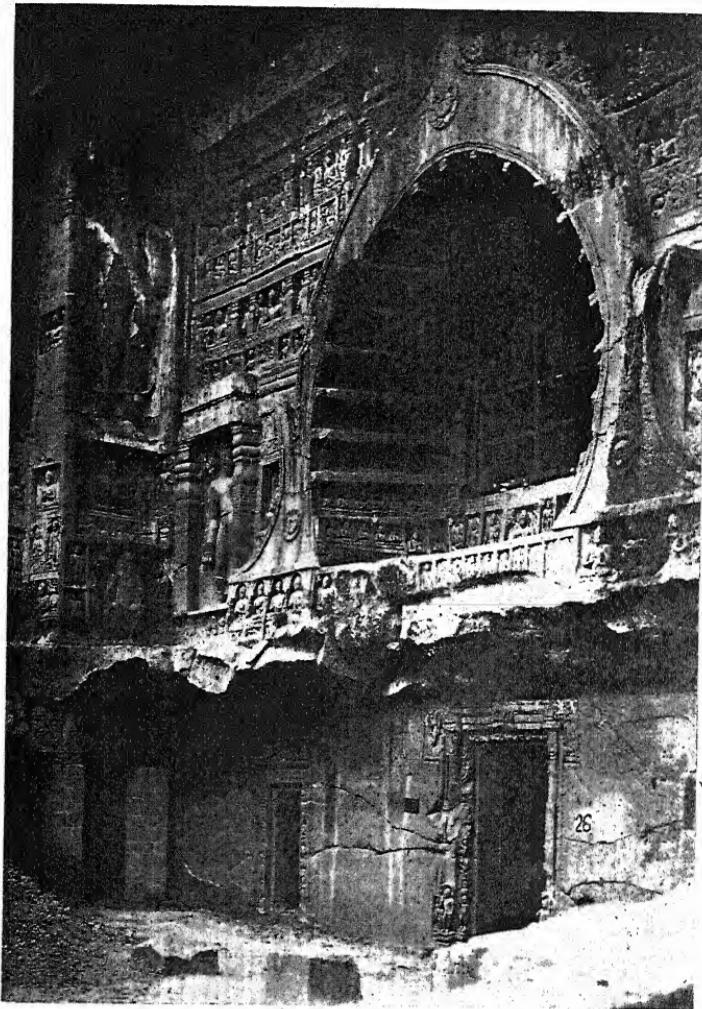
M. Andreas Nell in a recent discussion of the "Influence of Indian Art in Ceylon" points out the following as the main characteristics of the period of architecture previous to the *Guptas*. They were, "(1) the gigantism of the figures, (2) the flight of steps, columns, thresholds, and plinths, (3) the monolithic character of most, (4) the precision of outline, accuracy of surfaces and finished execution in hard syenite, limestone and granite, (5) the avoidance of florid scrolls, whorls, and excessive details."

### **Continuous Links**

Indian architecture is universally recognised as "one of the most original and independent styles." Its artistic range is not less rich, vast or varied than distinctive. And, the caves at Ajanta, cut and carved during a period of over seven hundred years, offer to the student of architectural forms and values an unusual opportunity and field for study. The characteristics, mentioned above, of the *Gupta* and pre-*Gupta* periods may be observed at Ajanta. From the architectural forms and details in these cave-cathedrals surviving from the ancient epochs, could be traced



"Chaitya" Façade



Another "Chaitya" Façade

not an insignificant number of the architectural motifs, details and forms which supply the links in the continued evolution, in India, of architecture from almost prehistoric to modern times. The monasteries and cathedrals of Ajanta disclose monuments of architectural importance and range not apparent, however, to those who would regard them as merely "caves."

The pillars with the bell-shaped capitals and "waterpot" bases, as well as the pillars with capitals ornamented with animal-figures, usually back to back, referred to by Cunningham, are here, it is true, conspicuous by their absence.

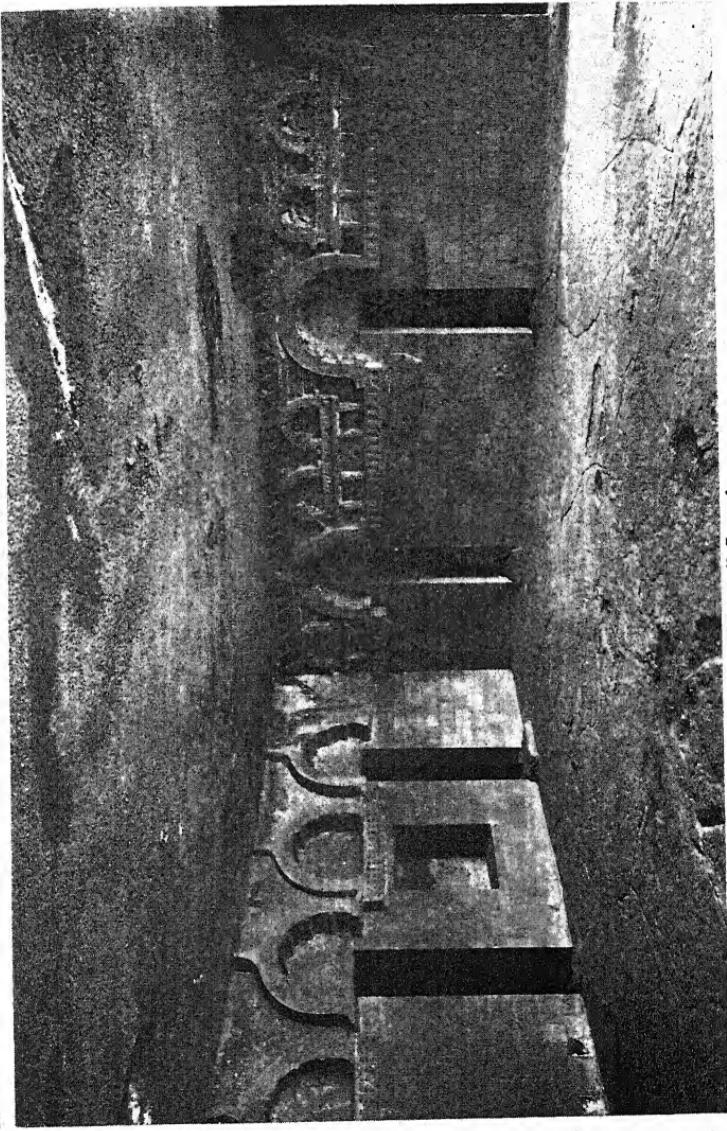
### **Rock Architecture**

Nearly every phase of rock architecture is, however, manifest at Ajanta. Probably, the *Chaitya* cave at Karli is more coherent or rather complete in design than those at Ajanta. But the compact series of *Chaitya* caves at Ajanta is, evidently, of greater importance to the student of architecture. For they show, as few of the other caves show, the evolution or change of form in the *Chaitya* and *Vihara* caves ; and the evolution, in construction and forms, from purely wooden to lithic architecture. A glance at the interior of *Chaitya* caves IX or X (Pl. IX) and the interior of caves XIX and XXVI (Pls. X, XI) would indicate, at once, the change that followed the change from *Hinayana*, the early, to *Mahayana*, the later, phases of Buddhism. A similar change in the *Viharas* is noticeable if one proceeds from, say, cave XI or XII (Pl. XIV) to cave XVII (Pl. XVI) at one end, or caves I and II at the other (Pls. XIX, XVII).

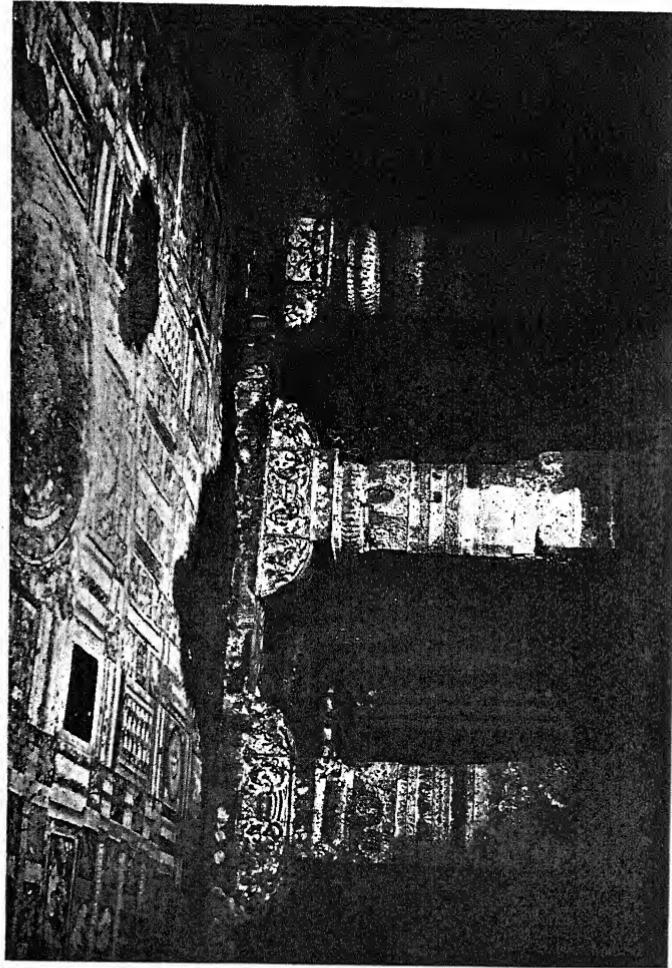
## *Chaitya Caves*

*Cave IX* Cave IX is considered to be "not only the oldest *Chaitya* in Ajanta, but as one of the earliest of its class yet discovered in the west of India." Its front elevation is in stone. The screen in the arch is believed to have been in wood. No figures have been carved, although the rough outline of one is incised in the right lower corner. It may be compared with the similar outline on the extreme corner inside the wing towards the verandah of cave XXVI. This cave is, in plan, square. Its columns, dividing the nave from the aisles, slope inwards. The columns in the central rows are plain octagonals with neither base nor capitals. The hall is lighted by the central arch, the most prominent of the features of the *Chaitya* shrines, and the corridors on its side are lighted by windows. The corridors are flat-roofed. But the main hall of the shrine indicates a ribbed and vaulted roof, with traces of wooden ribs. The stupa, or relic-shrine, is a plain high drum and dome crowned by the stepped *harmika* at the top. It is relieved by a faint indication of the "railing" motif. The columns (Pl. XXIII) in front immediately inside the threshold of the *Chaitya*, resemble, somewhat, the columns in the window of cave XI and also those of the ruined *mandap*, Mukundwara Pass, Kotah State, attributed to the *Gupta* of the early fifth century.

The decorative details and even the entrance porch and windows show a decided adherence to forms originally in wood.



"Vihara" Interior  
"Castellated Pyramid", Railing and "Chaitya" Arch Motives



"Vihara" Interior

*Carved Columns and Paintings on Ceiling*

## Wood to Stone

Cave X is of larger dimensions than cave IX. *Cave X* Otherwise, it is, in many ways, similar to cave IX. Only, unlike the stupa in the preceding shrine, the drum, as the base of the stupa here, is double-tiered and the dome is less abruptly placed on its base. The traces of the wooden rafters in the main vaulted hall of the shrine and the rock-cut rafters in the side corridors demonstrate the transition from wooden to lithic architecture. There appears to be little or no sign of the screen or façade which must have originally protected it.

## A Perfect Specimen

Cave XIX is similar in plan (Pl. XXIII-A) to all other *Chaitya* shrines at Ajanta, except *Chaitya* Cave IX, which is square in plan (Pl. XXIII-B). The later phase, *Mahayana*, as contrasted with the earlier, *Hinayana*, phase of Buddhism is rendered obvious by the contrast, exterior and interior, between caves IX (Pl. IX) and X and caves XIX and XXVI (Pls. X, XI). As will be seen at the first glimpse, Cave XIX is distinguished by its elaborately carved façade and entrance porch (Pl. XII). It has been considered as "one of the most perfect specimens of Buddhist art in India" and has been greatly and justly admired for the "beauty and completeness of its details."

*Cave XIX*

## Lithic Character

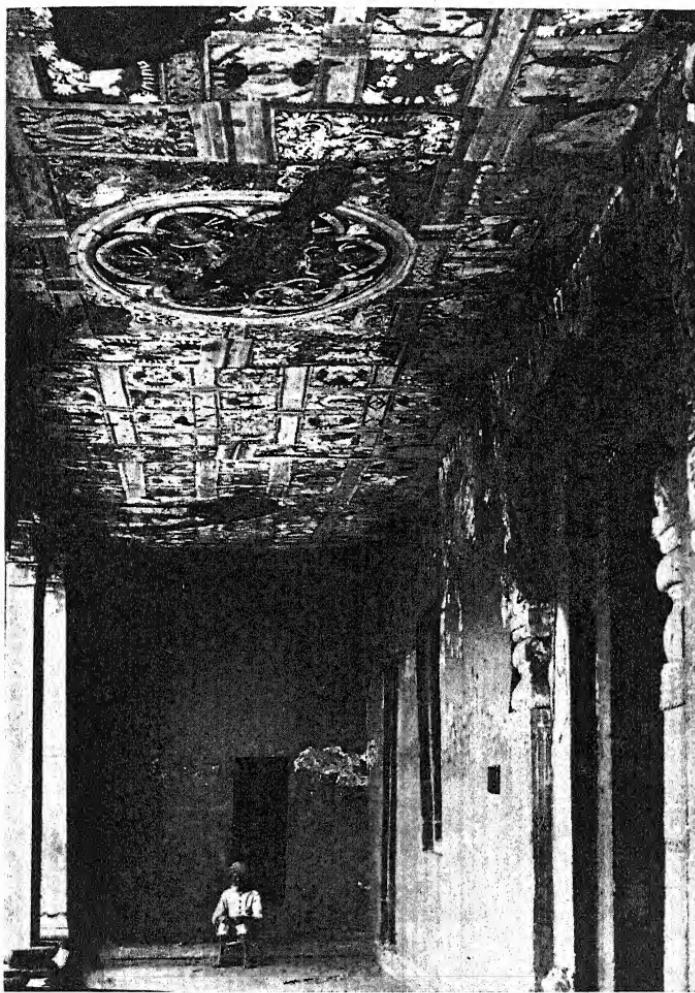
It is the instance of a *Chaitya* entirely in stone. The transition from wood to stone is approaching completion. And, the lithic character in architecture

is beginning to be distinctly articulate. The façade is, moreover, enriched by attractive figure sculpture. The "railing" motif of the earlier *Chaityas* seem thrust out of sight. The interior of the shrine (Pl. X) is not less elaborately carved than the exterior (Pl. XII). The column though plain and square at the base, soon changes as octagonal and circular shafts decorated with belts of exquisite tracery. The shafts between the belts being plain or ornamented with fluting, spiral in some and perpendicular in others. And, the bracket capitals bear a Buddha image flanked by flying figures. The roofs over the side corridors are flat and as there is only one entrance to the *Chaitya*, the corridors receive very little light from the front.

### **Changed Stupa and Umbrella**

The most instructive feature of the shrine is, however, to be found in the changed form of the stupa. Compare the stupa here with that of the cave IX (Pls. IX, X). The stupa is here obviously elongated.

The base is given, it would seem, greater importance as plinth and pedestal for the dome now diminished. The plinth and pedestal, moreover, bear architectural motifs. And, the standing figure of Buddha underneath the arch of the dome, the "*kimaras*" underneath him and another image of Buddha over the dome, show figure sculpture not to be found on the stupas of the earlier *Chaityas* (caves IX and X). The crowning feature, the "triple umbrella" over the dome tapering towards the roof, like a spire is another of the distinguishing marks of the shrine.



"Vihara" Verandah  
Paintings on Ceiling



**"Vihara" Verandah**  
*Sculptured Frieze, Doorway, Window and Columns*

## Diffused Decoration

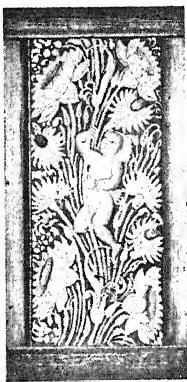
Cave XXVI (Pl. XIII) is the last of the *Chaityas Cave* at Ajanta. It is, in plan and front elevation, largely *XXVI* similar to cave XIX. The entrance porch has been destroyed. This *Chaitya* has not, however, the precise coherence of design and decoration which distinguishes cave XIX. The large-sized sculptures on the walls of the corridors, the heavy sculptures on the architrave and, generally, the undecided diffusion of decorative details, inside and outside of the shrine, rob it of much of its otherwise appreciable charm. The three entrances to the *Chaitya*, the raised base of the stupa along with its *mandap* motif in front (Pl. XI) and its plan reveal the feeling for architectural features absent in cave XIX.

## Origin of Dome and Arch

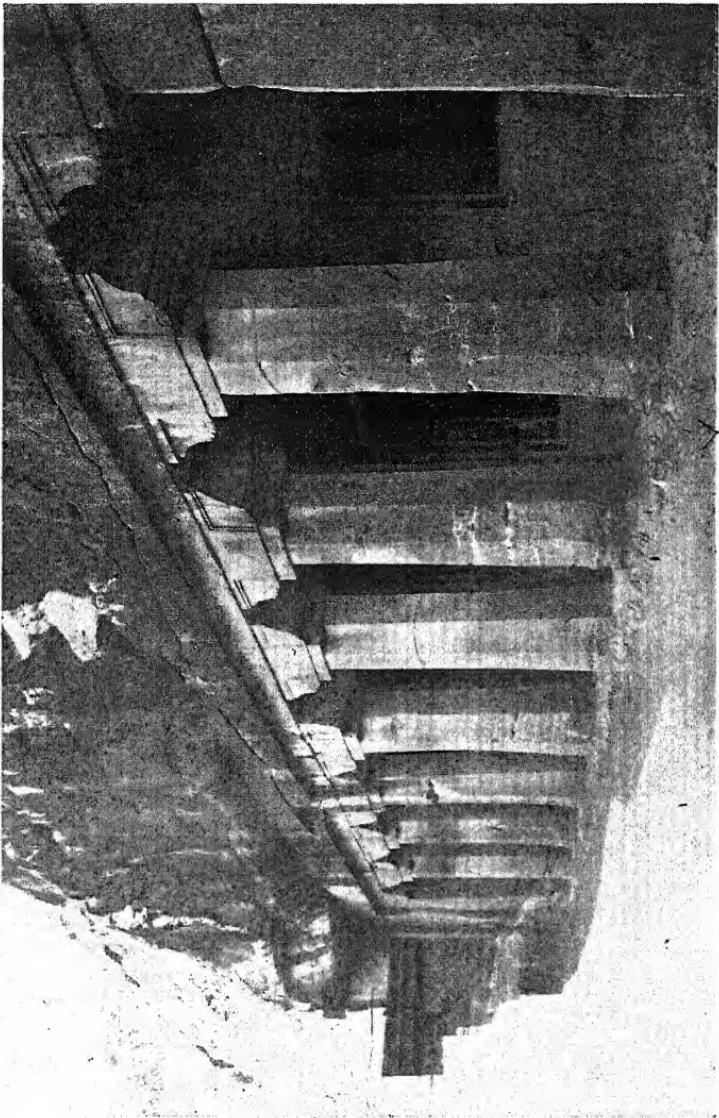
Exponents of Indian art have traced the resemblance of some of the prevalent architectural motifs, to the motifs found employed in ancient cave architecture. Mr. Havell has pointed out, particularly the dome of the stupa in cave XIX (Pl. X) as the prototype, more or less, of the *vimana* or dome, of the Hindu temples of the South; and also of the "bulbous" dome, the prominent feature of Mughal and later phases of North-Indian architecture. At a point somewhere behind the great stupa in cave XXVI (Pl. XI) can be seen, in profile, the clear-cut outline which reveals the striking resemblance of the upper part of the stupa to the *vimana* of the Hindu temples of the South. Mr. Havell would thus seem justified in regarding the Hindu *vimana* as the connecting link between the

Buddhist dome on the one hand and the "bulbous" dome of the Mughal and modern times on the other.

He also points out the "*Chaitya* arch" lighting the central hall of cave XIX (Pl. XII), as evidence of the pre-Mughal or Mahomedan knowledge and use in India of the radiating and pointed arch, another of the features of Indian architecture which acquired prominence during the Mughal times. These *Chaityas* provide, therefore, evidence and information no student of architecture can afford to overlook.



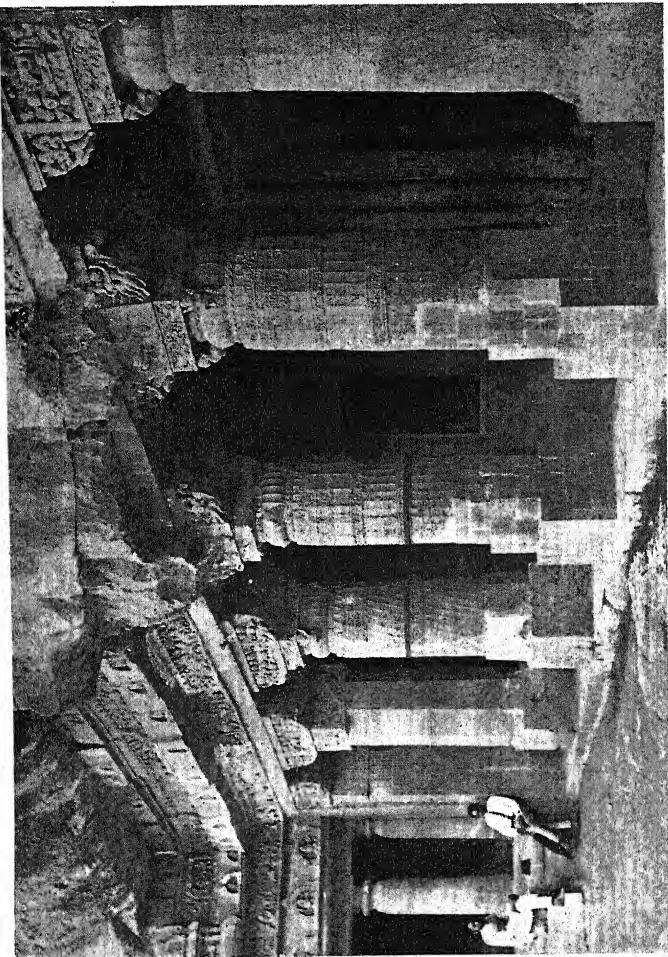
VIII—A



“Vihara” Verandah  
*Plain Colonnade*

XIX

Cave I



"Vikara" Verandah  
*Colonnade with Carvings*

## **Vihara Caves**

Cave XIII may be the oldest *Vihara* but it has *Cave XII* no architectural features. Cave XII seems to be equally old but it has some architectural points of interest (Pl. XIV). Its front and verandah seem to have disappeared. The hall with the architectural motifs over the cell doors may, however, be regarded as the earliest progressive attempt in *Vihara* architecture. It is decorated with the usual *Chaitya* arch, railing and band of castellated pyramids.

## **Earliest Pillars**

Cave XI has been noticed as "one of the earliest *Cave XI* examples of the introduction of pillars in *Viharas*."

## **Temple Mandap**

The columns of cave VII are reminiscent of those *Cave VII* at Elephanta, and the absence of a hall, the two porches on the verandah, like those of a temple *mandap*, and the raised chambers on its side, places the *Vihara* in a different class from the rest of the caves at Ajanta.

## **Two-storied Vihara**

Cave VI is the only two-storied *Vihara* in Ajanta. *Cave VI* The outer panelled wall of the *Vihara* under the four windows, the arrangement of the hall and stairs as well as the disposition of the columns and threshold suggest the influence of domestic architecture which ought not to remain unnoticed.

## Largest Vihara

*Cave IV*

Cave IV is the largest of the *Viharas*. The *yal*, or dragon figures, on the top corners of its threshold recall motifs common in Dravidian architecture. Its colonnade (Pl. XVIII) on the verandah is, for the austere and impressive simplicity of its lines, not less attractive than a well-placed Doric colonnade.

## Finest Vihara

*Cave I*

Dr. Burgess considers cave I (Pl. XIX) as "one of the finest *Viharas* of its kind." He is, however, not altogether accurate when he says that it is the "only instance" of a *Vihara* façade decorated with sculpture. The sculptured frieze on the exterior of the cave fully justifies his appreciation.

## Side Chambers

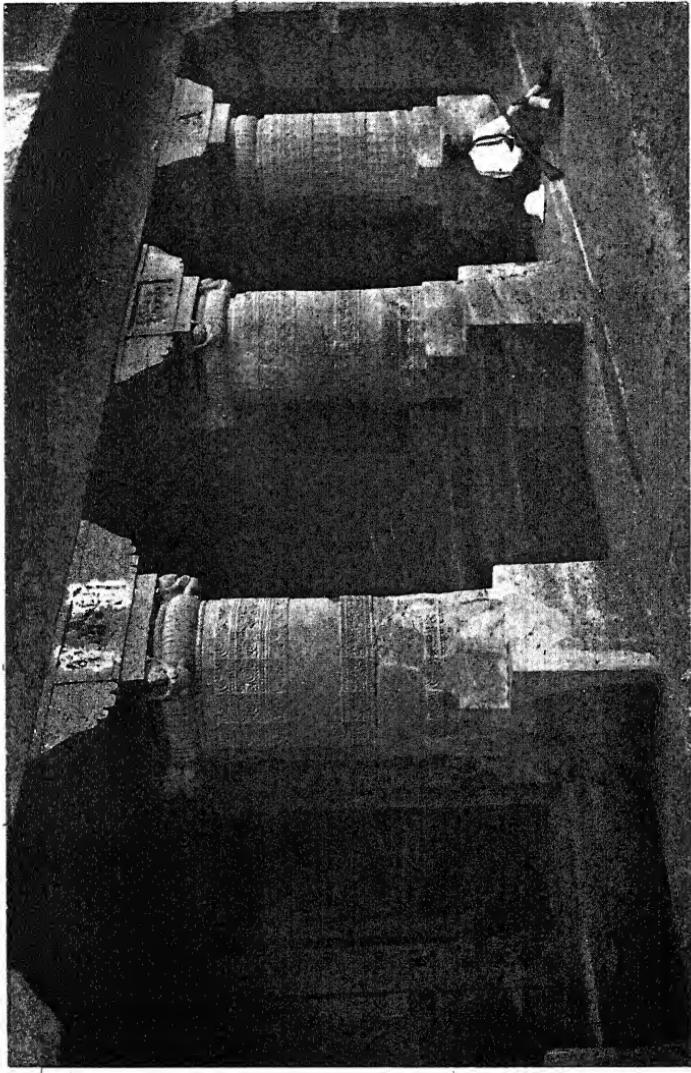
*Cave II*

Cave II (Pl. XVII) is, more or less, similar to cave I. Unlike cave I, however, it has, on each side of the wall at the back, a chamber with pillars, containing large-sized figure sculptures. It is, moreover, considered to be the only *Vihara* with traces of painting in its shrine. It is distinctly inferior to cave I in architectural arrangement, feeling and decoration.

## Highest Standard

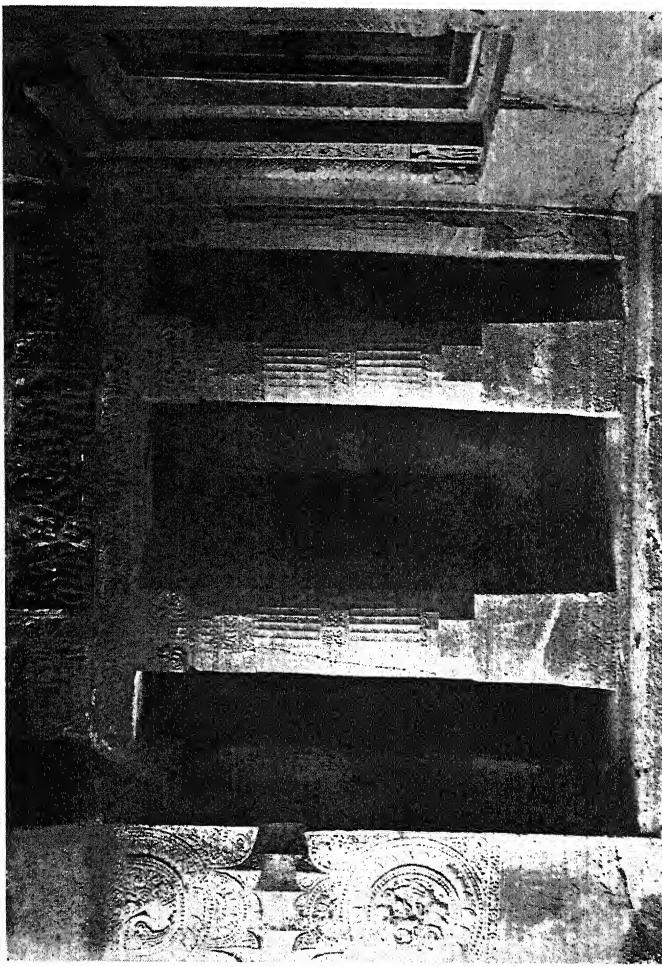
*Cave XVI*

Cave XVI is one of the *Viharas* of great importance to the student of architecture. The *Vihara*, in plan, (Pl. XXIII-B) in scale, in the disposition of its columns and ceilings, reveals, probably, the highest standard achieved in architectural composition at Ajanta. The undoubted skill with which the builder



"Vihara" Verandah  
*Another Colonnade with Carvings*

*XXI*



*Cave XXIII*

*Vihara* "Veranda  
Side Chamber and Carved Window

11

of the *Chaityas* utilised the *Chaitya* arch or window for illuminating the stupa in the main hall has been, frequently, and justly, the subject for appreciation. But the manner in which the master-builder of this *Vihara* sought and succeeded in illuminating the big image in the main shrine has scarcely been noticed, although it is neither less skilful nor less effective than the efforts of the builder of the *Chaityas*.

### **Light Focussed**

Look at the image in the shrine from the threshold of this *Vihara* and, again, look at the image in the shrine from the threshold of cave XVII and the contrast will be more than apparent. There can be only admiration for the master-builder of the *Vihara* who could thus flood the image in cave XVI with light directed from the threshold. The focal point in the architectural composition cannot be missed.

### **Beautiful Entrance**

It is the same builder-craftsman who has given us the massive simplicity of its columns on the verandah, the beautiful entrance flanked by carved elephants, and the landing with the beautiful *Naga* prince. The entrance marks the central position and importance of the *Vihara*, the original approach to the caves.

Another noticeable feature of the *Vihara* is the roof of the front aisle marked with beams and rafters and small stout figures as brackets on the capitals of the pillars, a distinct reminder of their origin in wood.

## Helpful Material

**Cave XX** Cave XX (Pl. XXII) is, again, another important object for study by the student of Indian architecture. The flight of steps with the carved ballustrade; nearly identical with the one of the *Gupta* period in Pol-lunowarra, Ceylon, leading towards the verandah and the pillars with the capitals of elegantly sculptured strut-figures of girls, the threshold of the shrine recalling the ancient "*toranna*" motif, almost identical with the motif painted on the columns of cave XVII, is more than enough material for those eager to understand the evolution, in India, of domestic and socio-religious architecture. For, this *Vihara* contains, also, the door jambs inside its hall which rake inwards. It has on the opposite side, again, a threshold with a decorative pyramid and dome reminiscent of the temples of the South. The portico in front of the shrine is only the familiar temple *mandap*.

Cave XXIV would have been, if finished, the most beautiful, it is believed, of the *Viharas*.

Cave XXV is important as indicating the exact process of the excavation of the caves.

### Variety of Columns

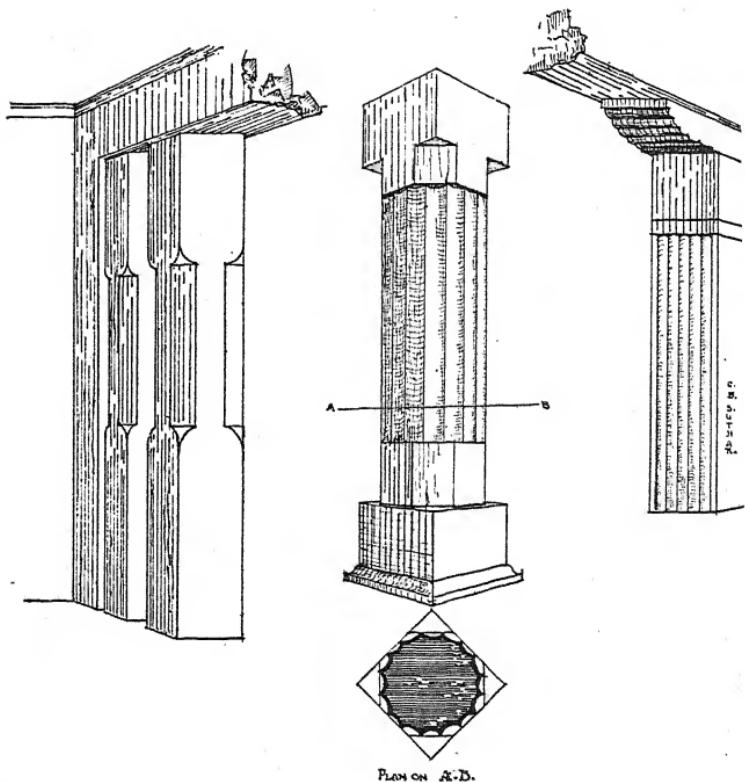
Every *Vihara* of the *Mahayana*, or later phase of Buddhism, has a Buddha image in the main shrine facing the central hall. And almost every *Vihara* of the times contains a series of colonnades, outside, on the verandah, as well as inside the hall. It would be therefore outside the scope of the present undertaking to attempt their description. Some idea of the



*"Vihara" Verandah  
Columns and Steps*

*XXIII*

*Caves IX &*



**Construction of Columns**

rich variety which distinguishes them could be obtained from the photos reproduced here—Pls. IX, X, XI, XII, XV, XVI, XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX, XXI, XXII and XXIII.

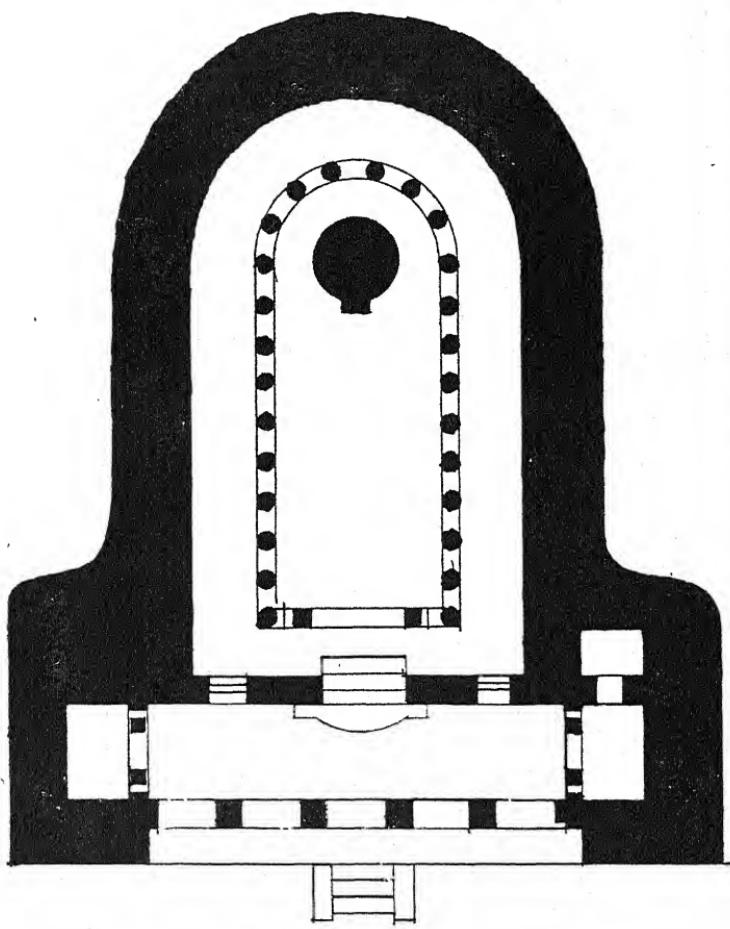
### **Viharas Neglected**

The *Chaityas* have often been examined by students and exponents of Indian art and architecture. But the *Viharas* have been practically neglected. No wonder they often deplore the lack of information and material about domestic and civic architecture. It is the *Viharas* which should, naturally, yield, if closely examined, the necessary information and fruitful results.



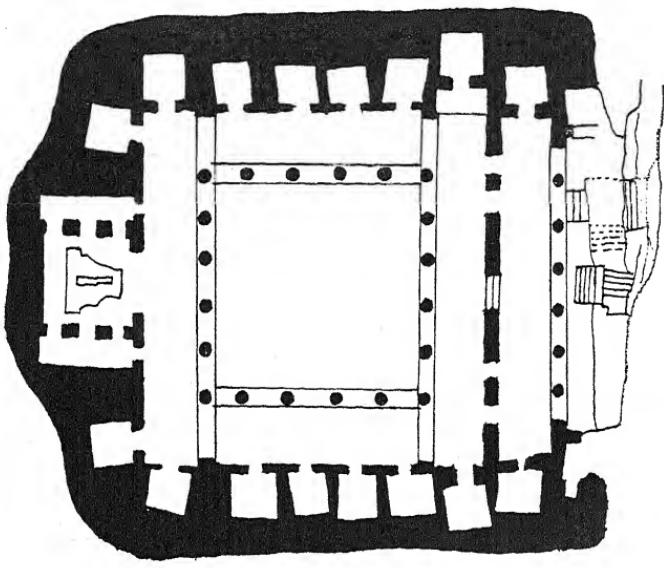
VIII—A





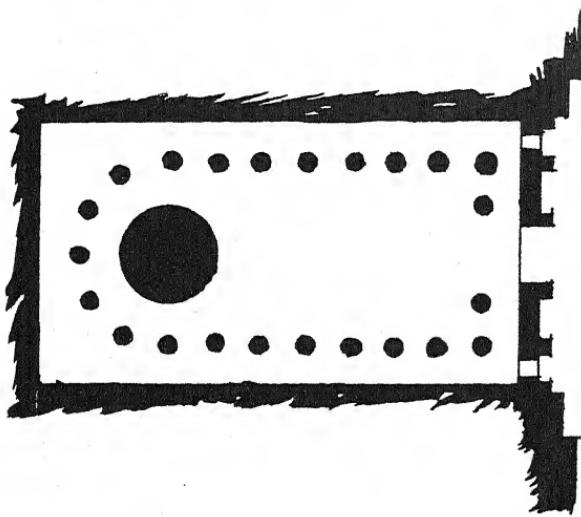
**“Chaitya” Plan  
(Apsidal)**

"Vihara" Plan  
(Rectangular)



XXIII-B

"Chaitya" Plan  
(Rectangular)



Caves IX & XVI

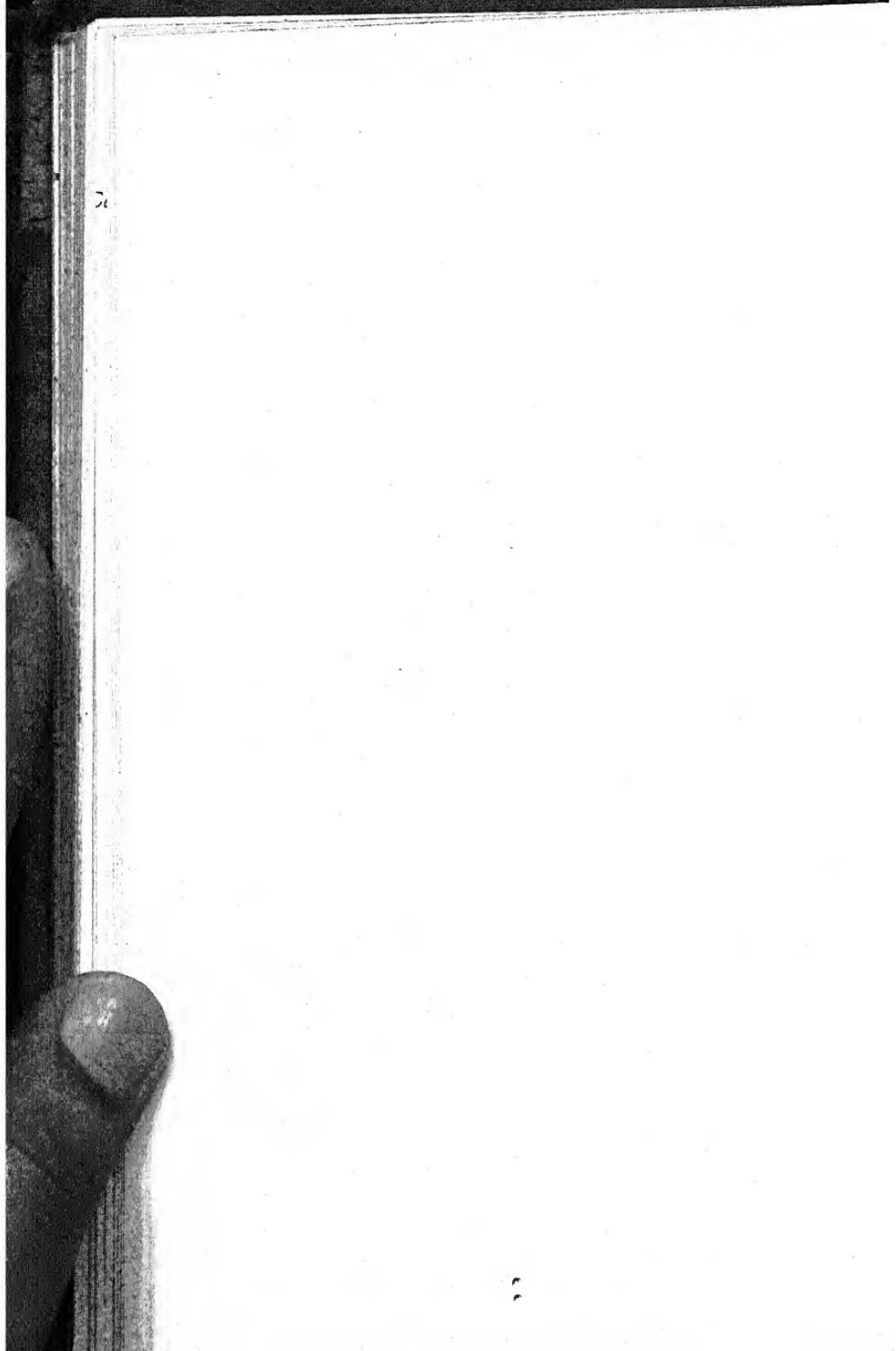
PART IV

**SCULPTURE**



**Main Caves of Interest**

CAVE I	CAVE XIX
CAVE IV	CAVE XXIII
CAVE VII	CAVE XXIV
CAVE XVI	CAVE XXVI





“Naga” King and Queen



**"Temptation of Buddha"**

"C'est la pensée de Dieu qui met le ciseau à la main de l'artiste."—(W. Cohn.)

The monuments of ancient India have been so frequently or rather persistently described from the historic or archæological, religious, philosophic or academic points of view that, despite an appreciable recent increase in the literature on the subject, a great number of the students and exponents of Indian Art has not yet recognised the necessity for a determined systematic effort to examine them from the point of view distinctly, if not wholly, artistic. Even Vincent Smith, who devoted justly a great deal of his comprehensive volume on "The History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon" to an elaborate exposition of the various "schools" and aspects of Indian sculpture, disposes of the very valuable and instructive series of sculptures at Ajanta with unseemly haste, off-hand attention and perfunctory comments and judgment. The rock-cut shrines and monasteries of the West are, he remarks "adorned with numerous sculptures more or less closely related with those of the North." And, at Ajanta "interest having been concentrated chiefly on the paintings the accounts of sculpture are meagre." It would be outside the purpose of this book to endeavour to describe at length the class or character of the sculptures, he broadly classifies as of the "*Gupta age*."

### **Valuable Field**

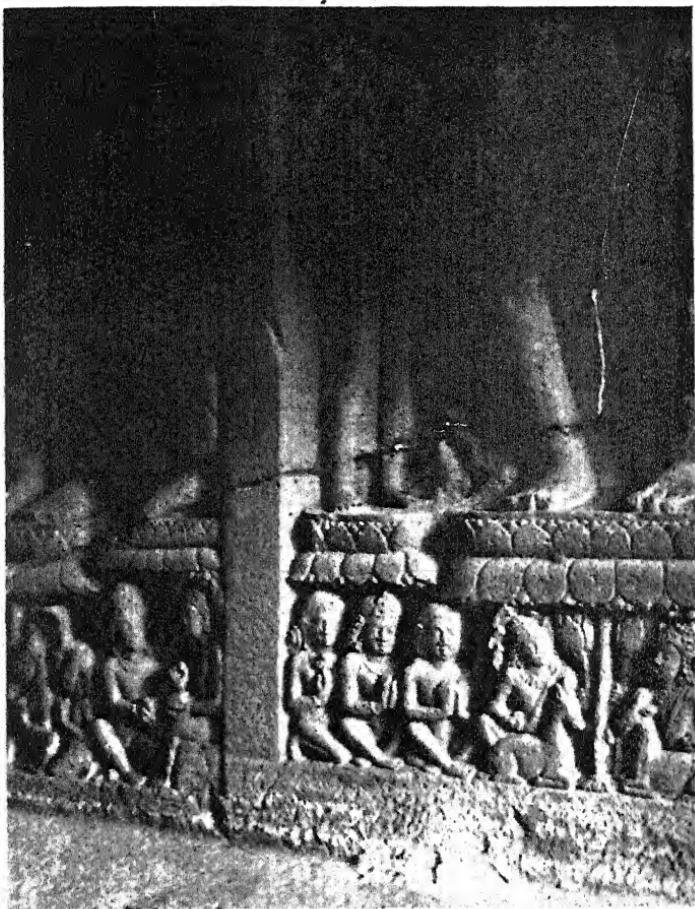
The paintings on the walls of Ajanta are, for many reasons, a heritage unique indeed in the history of Art.

But that is no reason why exponents of Indian Art should have, hitherto, practically neglected the numerous variety in the instructive series of sculptures at Ajanta. For reliefs, high and low, for sculpture in the round, for impressive individual figures as well as for large-scale composition, for arabesques, for geometric patterns as well as for architectural renderings in sculpture, Ajanta offers as valuable a field of investigation and guidance as can be found at any other single ancient spot or monument in India. It should be realised that in the compact amphitheatre of cave-cathedrals at Ajanta, chapters in the history of Indian sculpture could be traced in continuity more or less, through a period of over seven hundred years, the complete period when Buddhism rose, developed and declined as the dominant religion of the land.

### Essentially Artistic

*Cave I*

How many of the exponents of Indian sculpture who seem to exhaust their epithets for *Gupta* and pre-*Gupta* sculpture, for the sculptures, say, at Sanchi, Bahrut, Amravati, for the Asokan columns or for "Gandhara" figures, have cared to examine the marvellous sculptured frieze, for example, carved on top of the verandah of cave I? How many places in India disclose a composition, carved in stone, so free, so full of life and so essentially artistic, as that frieze which interprets with logic and fidelity the human drama unfolding itself in an atmosphere alive with incidents from animal and rustic or folk-life as well as those from court life?



**Group of Worshippers**



**River Goddess**

## An Important Gallery

The verandah of cave IV is a gallery of sculpture *Cave IV* impossible to remain unnoticed by earnest students of sculpture. The statue of the "*Padma Pani*" in the big niche on the right is an example of the advanced craftsmanship of the carver, not often found in sculptures in stone. Probably, the modern whose values have been changed, if not quite perverted, by familiarity with the facile and, not seldom, unmeaning modelling in soft clay would be unable to appreciate the artistic value of direct carving in stone. The slender figure of the "*Padma Pani*," its refined modelling and intellectual physiognomy, are nevertheless, artistic results more than apparent. The sculptures which frame the niche and decorate the door jambs also deserve close attention. Observe carefully the small compartments beside the niche where a man and a woman escape panic-stricken from the mortal terror of a huge elephant rushing madly towards them. Or, look at the utter helplessness and abandon, close by, of a man seduced by the eternal temptress. Are there many examples, in India or elsewhere, of the sculptor's art that have the high standard and artistic value registered here? Look at the figure, on top of the door jamb of the woman leaning against the trunk of a tree and its sportive squirrel. Is it less elegant, less graceful in repose, than a similar and much admired figure painted on the walls of cave II?

## Powerful Art

Notice the skill with which the ancient sculptor *Cave VII* has interpreted the lotus leaves and buds and flowers

interspersed between the Buddha figures in the shrine of cave VII. Griffiths does not exaggerate "the power of these old artists as designers, and also of their knowledge of the growth of plants."

### **Naga Figures**

*Cave XVI*

The *Naga* figures carved on the left of the verandah of cave XIX (Pl. XXIV) have rightly received many tributes. But the *Naga* figure on the landing of the stairs leading towards the verandah of cave XVI and those on the door jambs of, say, cave XXIII (Pl. XXVIII) appear to have been denied the prominence and recognition granted by the writers on Indian sculpture to the *Naga* figures from, say, Mathura.

### **Treasure-Chest**

*Cave XIX*

Cave XIX (Pls. X and XII) is the sculptor's treasure-chest. It would be, consequently, futile to attempt a description of the numerous gems of sculpture stored and displayed there for the inspiring joy of posterity.

*Cave XXIV*

Cave XXIV is important for the flying figures carved with exquisite craftsmanship on the bracket capitals of its verandah.

### **Large Figures and Compositions**

*Cave XXVI*

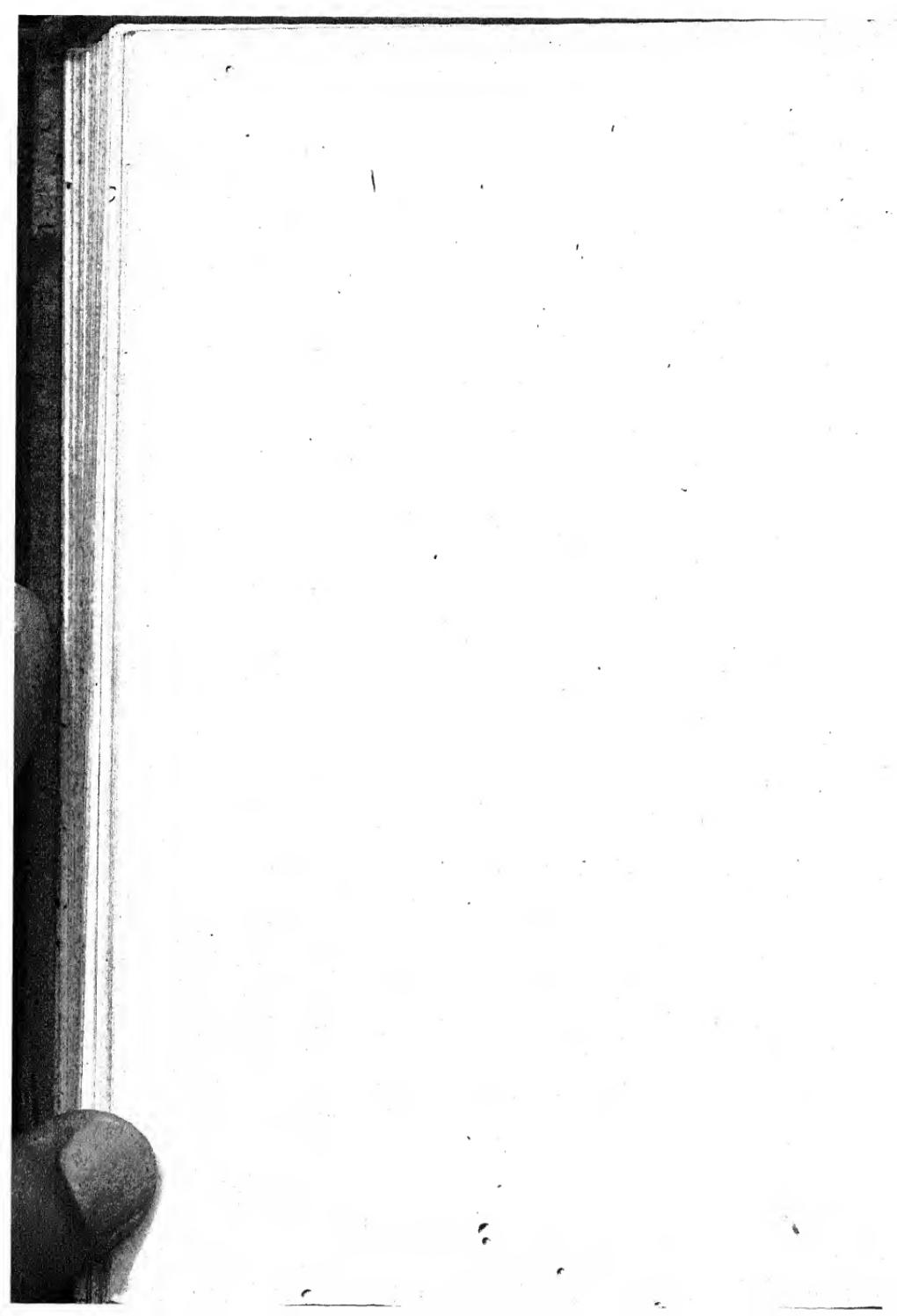
Cave XXVI is, like cave XIX, crowded with sculptures. Both the variety and size of the sculptures in this *Chaitya* are, however, different from those in cave XIX. This *Chaitya* is distinguished by its large-sized sculptures and the big compositions carved on the walls of its corridors. The colossal figure of Buddha's "*Nirvanna*" and "*The Temptation*" of

*XXVIII*

*Cave XXIII*



Threshold with Carved "Naga" Figures

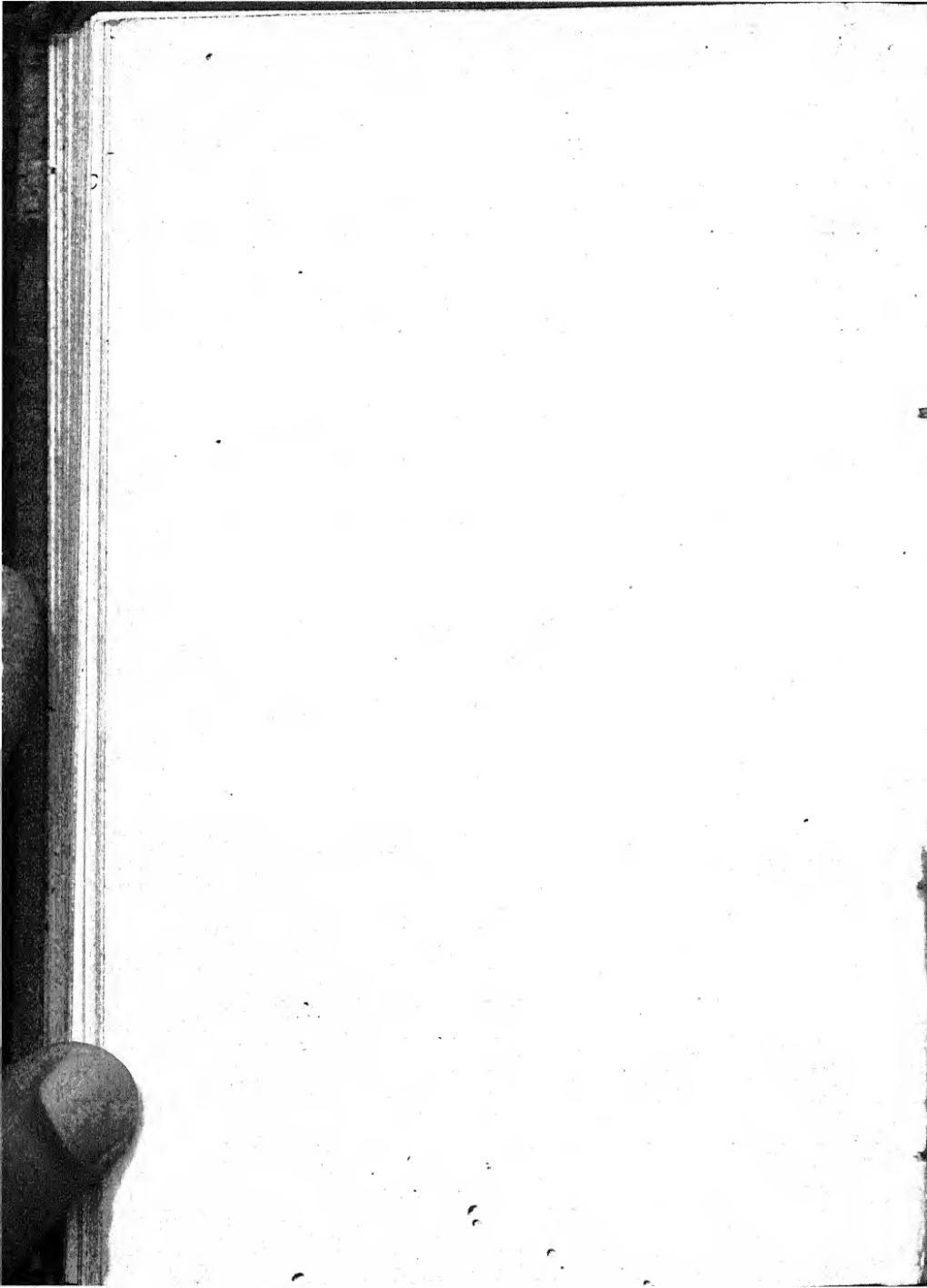


Buddha" depicted in stone on the wall of the left corridor immediately arrest attention. Vincent Smith has reproduced in his "History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon," with ill-concealed sarcasm, a miserable drawing of the carved "Temptation." No single drawing or photograph can do anything approaching justice to that composition carved with consummate skill, uncommon artistic insight and rare judgment (Pl. XXV). The sculptor's inherent skill in composition can be seen also in the figures of disciples and followers, ascetics, monks, rustics, kings and queens grouped underneath the colossal figure of *Bhagwan Buddha* (Pl. XXVI).

It would fill volumes for an adequate enunciation and appreciation of the infinitely varied and rich tracery, arabesques, patterns, birds and animals, sculptured with unerring artistic talent in almost every plane and corner and strewn with an astounding lavishness on the base shafts and capitals of columns, on the door jambs (Pls. XXVII and XXVIII), architraves and ceilings, walls and thresholds of the shrines. The big Buddha images, contained in almost every *Vihara*, would alone require a heavy volume of monographs.

### **Art Unfettered and Eternal**

Art at Ajanta, manifest in its paintings, architecture and sculpture, is virile and unfettered. Art at Ajanta is, like all great and enduring art, contemporary. It is related to and inspires Life. Like Life, it changes and grows. It is, therefore, of appeal universal and eternal.



## APPENDIX

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*Proceedings of His Exalted Highness the Nizam's Government in the Judicial, Police and General (Archæological) Departments.*

No. 10'6 Miscellaneous of  $\frac{1335}{1926}$  F. A.C.

Dated, Hyderabad (Deccan),  $\frac{24\text{th Farwardi } 1335}{(25\text{th February } 1926)}$  F. A.C.

READ :—

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## APPENDIX

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## • Studies in Indian Painting—*contd.*

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